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## Systematic Philosophy and Theology in an English Novelist: The Survival of the Franciscan Tradition in Charles Williams

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SYSTEMATIC PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY IN AN ENGLISH NOVELIST:  
THE SURVIVAL OF THE FRANCISCAN TRADITION IN CHARLES WILLIAMS

by

Arthur Livingston

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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I wish to thank my committee for its patience while they were waiting for some of the original thoughts in this paper to get thought, and for their forbearance in accepting this unusual approach; above all, I wish to acknowledge the original inspiration for this type of critical work, St. Bonaventure, in whose little pamphlet On the Reduction of Art to Theology I first learned how to apply the Way of the Affirmations to literary criticism.

## PREFACE

A literature that does not contain an informing structure built upon coherent thought is likely to represent a random collection of ideas without any real cohesion. Much of contemporary literary criticism blithely assumes that the whole of the significance inherent in a text rests in a simple unfolding of the arrangement of its images and motifs, as if a story or poem exists independent of its author's world-view. This is not to deny that much valuable work has been accomplished by the formalist approach; rather, the hegemony of that school of thought has precluded other possibilities from gaining a wide understanding.

The need for fresh approaches was made clear to me in April, 1978 at the home of Dr. Timothy Austin, who had invited his graduate class in linguistics to meet the eminent British linguist, Dr. Roger Fowler. Dr. Fowler gave a presentation of current techniques he had been developing to show the underlying meaning, or deep-structure (to use the terminology of that branch of English studies), of poems by W. H. Auden. After the ensuing discussion, Dr. Fowler was kind enough to speak to me privately on this topic for well over an hour, reviewing various possible alternatives to the critical approaches that have held the field in recent decades.

Though many details of that conversation have disappeared with the good fellowship of that evening, an extremely interesting

point that remains. As we continued to talk over new methodologies, Dr. Fowler left this student with a feeling that he believed he had found a rock upon which to ground his method of preserving the extra-literary meaning of a text without reducing it to nothing more than a philosophical treatise. Only at the end of that evening, when Dr. Fowler's Marxism was revealed, was the student forced to defend his orthodox Christianity. Fowler and the student finally agreed that his method could easily be used to preserve either ideology (or any other philosophy) for examination in serious literature without wrenching the thought from its literary context.

The speaker and the student agreed at that evening's talk that one school of thought, the pragmatic (which T. S. Eliot once derided as the "lemon-squeezer school"<sup>1</sup> of criticism), has virtually monopolized literary analysis for well over a generation; and that any one school of philosophical inquiry is virtually incompetent to judge the pre-suppositions and doctrines of any other school without falling into a hopeless muddle.

Each philosophical system contains an aesthetics appropriate to its own biases which flows inevitably from its metaphysical and ethical beliefs. For idealists, aesthetics is the queen of the sciences. Materialists, say, by their own standards, are thus incapable of determining the artistic quality of a poem by Keats or an essay by Santayana. Such

<sup>1</sup>Russell Kirk, Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century. (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 398.

attempts have produced a great deal of horrendous communist and psychological criticism over which it is best to draw a curtain of charity. But a Marxist or Freudian can tell us whether or not a work is good Marxism or Freudianism and whether or not it follows the canons of the aesthetics that flow from those persuasions.

The assumption to be made from this data is that all literature worthy of the name is to some extent a literature of ideas. As Vernon Parrington observed over half a century ago: "...poetasters have shouldered aside vigorous creative thinkers."<sup>2</sup> The object of these pages is to show the possibility of reengaging literary work with the history of ideas rather than to cater to "those whose disedged appetites find no savor in old-fashioned beef and puddings."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature From the Beginnings to 1920 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1930), p. vi. Parrington argued for maintaining a critical tradition of discussing literature in terms of its manifest ideas rather than limiting discussion to formal elements.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, pp. vi-vii.

## VITA

The author, Arthur Paul Livingston, Jr., is the son of Arthur Paul Livingston, Sr. and Maxine (Baker) Livingston. He was born July 1, 1943, in Chicago, Illinois. His elementary education was obtained in the public schools of Chicago, Illinois, and his secondary education at Kelvyn Park High School, Chicago, Illinois, where he graduated in 1961.

From September 1961, to August 1963, he attended the City Junior Colleges of Chicago. From March 1964, to June 1968, he attended DePaul University, part-time, receiving the degree of Bachelor of Philosophy with a major in English in June 1969. In July 1970, he matriculated at the Rosary College School of Library Science, and in May 1971, he was awarded the degree of Master of Arts in Library Science. In March 1972, he reentered DePaul University, and in April 1974, he was granted the Master of Arts with distinction in the field of English.

From September 1965, to June 1970, he taught elementary school for the Archdiocese of Chicago. In September 1972, he was awarded an assistantship in English at DePaul University. From October 1973, to June 1977, he worked for the Chicago Public Library as a professional librarian in the capacity of the initiator and first incumbent of its internal film department. In September 1977, he was granted an

assistantship at Loyola University of Chicago, and in 1980, he was awarded a University Fellowship at that institution. In September 1980, he became Assistant Director of the Writing Center at the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle, and in January 1981, he was accepted at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary for a special study program leading to ordination to the Perpetual Diaconate of the Episcopal Church.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . .	ii
PREFACE . . . . .	iii
VITA . . . . .	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS . . . . .	viii
CONTENTS OF APPENDICES . . . . .	ix
 Chapter	
I. THE NATURE OF SYSTEMATIC PHILOSOPHY . . . . .	1
II. THE AESTHETICS OF CONCEPTUALISM . . . . .	16
III. THE CONCEPTUALISM OF CHARLES WILLIAMS . . . . .	33
IV. THE CRITICAL RESPONSE TO CHARLES WILLIAMS . . . . .	67
V. <u>SHADOWS OF ECSTASY</u> AS A CONCEPTUALIST NOVEL . . . . .	93
VI. CONCEPTUALISM IN THE REMAINING NOVELS . . . . .	153
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	165
APPENDIX I . . . . .	181
APPENDIX II . . . . .	183

CONTENTS FOR APPENDICES

	Page
APPENDIX I    Chart of Possible Real Philosophies. . . . .	181
APPENDIX II   Chart of Idealistic Perpendicularity . . . . .	183

## CHAPTER I

### THE NATURE OF SYSTEMATIC PHILOSOPHY

To comprehend the relationship of philosophy to literature as it affects the novels of Charles Williams, it is first necessary to establish the validity of some analytical tool that will allow the investigator to recognize a generic philosophy, and then to be able to distinguish the specific differences among the individual philosophical systems. In this paper, the writer will identify eight distinct schools of thought and place the thought of Williams in one of these traditions. It will further be argued why this tradition, better than any of the others, elucidates the achievement of Williams.

From one point of view, that of Richard McKeon of the University of Chicago, philosophies may be analyzed into principles, methods and conclusions.<sup>1</sup> Professor McKeon, perhaps the dean of American philosophy teachers, has influenced a whole literature that has come to be known as historical semantics. McKeon himself was influenced by A. O. Lovejoy's The Great Chain of Being.<sup>2</sup> The best known of the many extrapolations of

<sup>1</sup>Richard McKeon, Thoughts, Actions and Passions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), pp. 1-29.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936).

McKeon's approach has been the Great Ideas and Great Books programs in the Syntopicon of Mortimer Adler.<sup>3</sup> Less familiar but more rigorously systematic have been the works of Stallknecht and Brumbaugh,<sup>4</sup> who attempted a synthesis of the oeuvre of McKeon and Steven Pepper, the author of World Hypotheses.<sup>5</sup> The strong influence of Alfred North Whitehead on Stallknecht and Brumbaugh, however, led to the basing of their synthesis on numerous idealistic concepts to be found in The Function of Reason.<sup>6</sup> In this paper, I have generally followed the descriptions of philosophical systems in a more contemporary thesis,<sup>7</sup> one using an approach that neither proliferates categories like McKeon, nor overly conflates them like Pepper.

The discipline starts with the idea that confronted with any quandary, the human person discovers that he lacks certain knowledge in order to be able to solve a given problem. There are two possible methods

<sup>3</sup>Mortimer J. Adler, ed. The Great Idea: A Syntopicon of Great Books of the Western World (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 2v. (Vols. 2-3 of Great Books of the Western World in 54v.)

<sup>4</sup>N. P. Stallknecht and R. S. Brumbaugh, Compass of Philosophy (New York: Longmans, Green, 1954).

<sup>5</sup>Steven Pepper, World Hypotheses (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

<sup>6</sup>Alfred North Whitehead, The Function of Reason (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

<sup>7</sup>William Lloyd Smith, "System Construction in Science, Theology and Philosophy: The Myths Men Live By." Thesis. DePaul University, Chicago, 1971, passim.

of filling in the lacunae, both of which begin with experience. In the first, the person takes from experience some class of events, gives this class the dignity of calling it a principle, and then follows the implications of this principle, and treats the conclusions there drawn as valid, possessing the comparable dignity and certitude of the original events. This way of dealing with events is called synthesis.

Alternatively, the second method--that of analysis--takes some assemblage of events, and reduces the whole to some basic element, type, form, or purpose in an attempt to discover the original nature of reality. At this point, it should be noted that the very method or logical approach selected by the observer results from the class of events chosen to initiate the process, which is an elaborate way of saying that metaphysics (or first principles) is also a meta-logic, itself determined by the events selected to begin the rational process.

The term metaphysics has four possible meanings; the first three derive from Aristotle directly, while the fourth comes from him by a barbarism. Three of the meanings are accidental in the Aristotelean sense that distinguishes substance from accident. Because Aristotle's first principles were taken from logical categories, those thinkers who use epistemological, anthropological, or linguistic principles have often been considered anti-metaphysical; because metaphysics comes to theological conclusions, some shallow thinkers have confused the two, to the disservice of both disciplines. Finally, metaphysics has been used as a misnomer for the occult sciences. It seems more useful to employ the terms a) metaphysics, b) ontology, c) theology, and d) occult to describe the four differing concepts.

The first (and most proper) meaning of metaphysics is first principles or arche protas. This designation emanates from a dilemma that Aristotle states both in the Metaphysics<sup>8</sup> and the Posterior Analytics.<sup>9</sup> He argues persuasively that every argument must begin somewhere with either an unproven statement or with an undefined term, because of the problem of infinite regress or vicious circle. If we prove A by B and B by C to the N, the logical progression must stop at some point, or else repeat the process, proving C by B and B by A. Hence, the unproven premises (gratuitously called self-evident) of any philosophy constitute the metaphysics of that school of thought, which in turn will generate the aesthetic bases of any art flowing from it. It is necessary to note that it makes no difference whether the philosopher starts with undefined terms (the preference of logical positivists) or with unproven principles (the preference of classical philosophies) because every principle, being a proposition, is composed of terms; and the definition of any term is composed in a sentence. Therefore, it follows that the attempt to resolve metaphysics in terms of a preference either for first terms or for first principles leads once again into the dilemma of infinite regress or vicious circle.

The metaphysician uses first principles to discover new knowledge. Not every random thought or prejudice has much of a chance of being generally accepted as a self-evident proposition, nor as an intuitive term.

<sup>8</sup>Aristotle, "Metaphysics," in Basic Works, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), pp. 715-751.

<sup>9</sup>Aristotle, "Posterior Analytics," Basic Works, pp. 110-113.

(For these purposes, Newton's length, time, and mass are terms, whereas Aristotle's laws of identity, excluded middle, and non-contradiction, are principles.) From these considerations it follows that the terms of metaphysical discourse, as well as the concomitant principles, must be posterior to the act of knowing, since the function of metaphysics is to proceed from the known to the unknown.

To attempt to understand comprehensively, historical semantics tries to discover perspectives thinkers and writers have used over the centuries. The present author has been fortunate enough to have become acquainted with a systematic analysis which is almost perfect for the present purpose. In this system, the act of knowing involves four elements: a knowing subject (anthropology), a way of knowing (epistemology), a language which communicates that which is known (linguistics) and a known object (ontology). Each of the possible metaphysical positions has the general form stating that man is an A (anthropological term like will, intellect, body or agent) who by E (epistemological term such as intuits, perceives, senses or alters) the I (a linguistic index such as meaning, category, matter or utility) of O (ontological term such as existence, essence, event or relation). Eight possible real philosophies result. (See Appendix I)

The chart contained in the appendix shows a complete catalogue of all possible first principles, which can be confirmed by taking a standard history of philosophy and correlating the first principles of each of the philosophers discussed with the schema of the chart. Although this eight-fold analysis may not be the last word in historical semantics, it is adequate for the purposes of this study.

The statement above that principles determine methods is now demonstrable. If a philosopher starts with one principle as he does in any of the monistic systems, (which reduce all reality to only mind or only matter), he must use an analytical logic for the simple reason that some logical forms, e.g., syllogism, can only begin with two parallel propositions (S is M, and M is P); and a dialectical logic must have two partially contradictory first principles. The Hegelians, Marxists, Buddhists and Spinozans use the notion that every unity contains internal contradictions; no such contradictions would be possible unless every experience contains more than one principle.

The monistic philosophers, who start from one principle and then analyze it (because all that can be done with one reality is to examine it), nevertheless differ from each other in the results of their analysis by virtue of the content they choose to consider.

Some illustrative examples will be profitable at this point. (It should be added that the labels employed to designate some of these philosophies are by no means satisfactory; one hardly thinks of Thoreau as a naturalist, Rousseau as a mystic or Gautama Buddha as a materialist, but the rigors of logic in this field force the analyst into such seeming anomalies.) The mystic begins with his given revelation, and confronts his opponent by accepting his antagonist's facts, but denies his rationale. Thus, Henri Bergson in Creative Evolution begins with his all-absorbing intuition of the Hebrew Father-God and then confronts the Darwinian evolutionists by accepting their data but showing that Darwin's rationale of the survival of the fittest coupled with the idea of natural



selection is inconsistent with these data.<sup>10</sup> Once having shown Darwin's mistake, Bergson is free to assimilate evolution as the creative working of God in the universe. Rousseau confronts the social contract theories of materialists like Spinoza and Hobbes with a defense of his own mystical belief in freedom by arguing that mankind entered the social contract only to preserve its own freedom, and that when the social contract stands in the way of human freedom, it is null and void. Thus, Rousseau is free to use the argument that when any social contract fails to meet the needs of human freedom, men must revolt and create a new contract. This is another example of mystical assimilation.

The idealist finds in his experience (which, ex-hypothesis, is the only possible ground for his empiricism) various categories which are always two analytical pairs perpendicular to each other, e.g., the wet-dry, hot-cold of Anaximander. Perhaps the most fecund modern example is contained in the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. In The Function of Reason, he maintains that there are four ways of looking at reality.<sup>11</sup> In his attempt to refute the notions of entropy and the death of the world, arguments extrapolated from the common understanding of the second law of thermo-dynamics (the hypothesis that the degenerate form of all energy is heat and, therefore, when all the bodies in the universe have reached the same temperature, all action--including life--will stop),

<sup>10</sup>Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution (New York: Henry Holt, 1911), passim.

<sup>11</sup>Whitehead, The Function of Reason, passim.

Whitehead posits an idealist scheme. His two sets of opposite terms are Bergson's God against Einstein's materialist universe and, perpendicularly, Plato's ideas contrary to Aristotle's prime matter. (See Appendix II) While it is perfectly true that the closed-universe, as seen from Einstein's point of view, is slowly reaching a heat-sink death, an examination of the other positions on the chart reveals that Bergson's God continually shovels new Aristotelian prime matter into the universe and organizes it into the forms of Plato's ideas. In this metabolic analogy, the anabolism that destroys the universe for Dr. Einstein balances a continuous creation which replaces all which was lost by entropy, and indeed this process increases the intensity of reality and even its amount by catabolism. The process involved in all such idealistic philosophy is one of categorization.

A light-hearted but apt example of such procedure would be contained in the preparation of spaghetti sauces. Each tomato-based spaghetti sauce is unique; but each contains tomato sauce, onions, garlic, and olive oil. It is important to note that for every idealist, all four of his categories are immanent, but that only one is also transcendent (e.g., Bergson's God, or whatever is the principal ingredient giving the spaghetti sauce its essential savor). The model Whitehead erects derives from Plato's idealistic trilogy (The Sophist, The Statesman, and Parmenides) in which it is taught that the four categories are motion and rest perpendicular to being and non-being.<sup>12</sup> As the opposite of

<sup>12</sup>Plato, "The Sophist," in Dialogues, ed. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Random House, 1937), ii. 221-280.

nothing, Being is transcendent, and as substance it is immanent.<sup>13</sup> It should be noted in passing that only in this trilogy does Plato use language precisely in this way.

The naturalist seeks to reduce all reality to only atoms of time and space. Two of the more famous examples are the atoms of Democritus or Epicurus, and the moments of time in David Hume's thought, moments so radically discreet that they even deny the possibility of any causality. In a naturalistic novel, two characters cannot even understand each other unless they share the identical experience, and it follows, from the same point of view, that a man and a woman in such literature are never able to understand each other because of his masculine and her feminine points of view. (Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms is a classic case in point.) Because abstract nouns have no meaning for the naturalist, he will impose no categories. He can write about Joe or Harry, but not about mankind, just as Walt Whitman writes about leaves of grass, or a song of himself. The naturalist is usually obsessed with the perverse, the unique, the different, the freak. Much of the modern American theatre, the stages of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, is the domain of naturalists. Their works are usually short, because all they can give is immediate detail.

The pragmatist is concerned solely with the context in which knowledge is gained. For him, there are actions without actors. The person is the sum total of those actions whose utility he is capable of

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

altering. An obvious example is Ayn Rand, who uses, or perhaps abuses, Aristotle's rules of logic as captions for her chapters in The Fountainhead.<sup>14</sup> The only real people for Miss Rand are those who are able to alter the world. There is a distinctly similar view in neo-Freudianism, neo-Marxism, and neo-Darwinianism. The vast majority of American psychoanalysts are representative of the neo-Freudian viewpoint; Leon Trotsky's opportunistic communism is the prime example of neo-Marxism; whereas the relativism of John Dewey or the social Darwinians adhere to a pragmatic neo-Darwinianism. Many, though by no means all, of the attempts of structuralist critics to accept nothing but relationships within a text as the only valid mode of treating a piece of literature are but further means of presenting pragmatism as the yardstick by which all insight is gained. In another case, that of Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness under the label of "Existential Psychoanalysis," the author gives the reader the paradigm of the skier who, like all of Sartre's anti-heroes, possesses an essence that is merely a whim, and who has an existence made manifest only by that essence.<sup>15</sup> He maintains that the snow by itself is nothing, or rather, that it is both a bridge and a swamp; it becomes what it "is" by virtue of the use that the skier makes of it. But the skier only enters reality by using himself as a skier. He has no reality

<sup>14</sup>Ayn Rand, The Fountainhead. 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), passim.

<sup>15</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology, tr. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Citadel Press, 1956), passim.

in himself; he is only his project, i.e., his being as skier.<sup>16</sup>

Turning to the dualistic philosophers (those who hold that reality has at least two natures, e.g., mind and matter), in the Republic of Plato, in which both the idealistic mind and the naturalistic body are principles, it is found in the Allegory of the Cave that the body truly senses but does not perceive that which must be understood by dialectical climbing. Rationalistic literature, written on the assumption of the truth of this stage of Plato's development, consists of works of discovery as, say, in the novels of Thomas Wolfe where he delights in playing with the concepts of Hegel's logic, the sole function of which is to supply Plato's Republic with a methodology: "A stick is not a stick, but also the negation of stick."<sup>17</sup> A thesis has changed into an anti-thesis from which synthesis is possible. In the long, searching novels of Wolfe, the actions do not exist for the sake of those actions, but rather for the sake of the self-revelation of the main character, who only at the end comes to know who he is.<sup>18</sup>

In contra-distinction to the rationalism of Plato is the will-intellect dichotomy of Aristotle, or realism (ontologically, St. Thomas Aquinas's distinction between essence and existence),<sup>19</sup> which in the form

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas Wolfe, Of Time and the River (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1935), Such dialectical horseplay is scattered throughout the text.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. passim.

<sup>19</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, On Being and Essence (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1949), p. 56.

of the Poetics, is probably the source of more verbiage than all the other critical tools combined; the all-pervasive influence of the Poetics on neo-classical writing is too well-known to be mentioned except in passing. The contemporary audience is perhaps familiar with the films of Alfred Hitchcock, the actions of which are never very far from Aristotle's understanding of catharsis. Hitchcock himself maintained that he designed his films with the express intention that his audience experience intense emotion, and then be purged from it.<sup>20</sup>

It is a truism that because Aristotle treated man as a mixture of substance and accident, and because he held that only formal and final causes are of the nature of the divine being, he regarded only those emotions capable of universalization as being proper perfections of humanity. Hence joy and happiness make a man to be a man because they are the same in all men, but fear and anger are unique in each man, and hence they are defects in his humanity which must be expunged by catharsis so that he may return to his universality. One may remember Tolstoy's famous opening line in Anna Karenina: "Each happy family is happy in the same way, but that each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Francois Truffaut and Helen G. Scott, Hitchcock (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), passim.

<sup>21</sup> Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, tr. Constance Garnett (New York: Heritage Press, 1952), p. 15.

In materialism, which is a combination of naturalism and mysticism [see Appendix I] (Marx would have said base and super-structure, or Freud would have said instinct and conscious ego), a writer so minded produces works with an immense amount of naturalistic detail; every bit of this detail is organized to some central fruition such as the withering of the state to be reached at the end of Marx's communism, or the achievement to be attained by Freud's psychoanalyzed man. The function of thought to the materialist is to resolve his contradictions so as to reach his inevitable nirvana. An excellent literary example is found in Herman Hesse's Siddhartha.<sup>22</sup> The hero (Buddha) conquers temptation by giving in to it, and is, therefore, no longer bothered by it. Because materialist authors by their nature must take their readers through a seemingly interminable number of contradictions before arriving at their ultimate heavens, they tend to produce huge works like the Cowperwood trilogy of Dreiser,<sup>23</sup> and because they do not believe in a transcendent good and evil, they must show even capitalistic heroes like Cowperwood as great and glorious beasts in life's jungle. Materialistic writers in the guise of Calvinistic determinism (absolute determinism is the hallmark of this philosophy) have provided a wide literature which includes the works of Melville, Hawthorne, Somerset Maugham and Marcel Proust.

The remaining position is that of the conceptualist, who is determined to retain both Aristotle's distinction between the will and the

<sup>22</sup>Herman Hesse, Siddhartha, tr. Hilda Rosner. New Classics Series (New York: New Directions, 1951), passim.

<sup>23</sup>Theodore Dreiser, The Financier (New York: Bell and Cockburn, 1912) The Titan (New York: Bell and Cockburn, 1914); The Stoic (New York: World Publishing, 1972), passim.

intellect, and Plato's distinction between the mind and the body inasmuch as--for the conceptualist--will, intellect, and body are three separate principles. This position is perhaps best understood by turning to Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov, though philosophically it is better understood in terms of Kant's three types of propositions (synthetic a priori, analytic, and synthetic a posteriori),<sup>24</sup> Soren Kierkegaard's Three Stages on Life's Way (aesthetic, ethical, and religious),<sup>25</sup> Dun Scotus's addition of haecceitas or thisness to matter and form as principles,<sup>26</sup> or the Socratic is, could, and ought of the Euthyphro.<sup>27</sup> In The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky presents the sensualist Smerdyakov, the idealist Ivan, and the mystical Alyosha as the three stages in the life of the whole man Dmitri, who goes through sensualist, intellectual, and mystical stages.<sup>28</sup> The sine qua non of conceptualist aesthetics is that a work of art should attempt to balance these three stages with each other, so that it takes both the extra-artistic premise that the artist holds as a man, and the sensuous aesthetic detail of the world he chooses to describe, and synthesizes them into a wholly new intellectual form created for a specific resolution, i.e., the individual work of art.

<sup>24</sup> Immanuel Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason, tr. Norman Kenny Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), passim.

<sup>25</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, Stages of Life's Way, tr. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), passim.

<sup>26</sup> Etienne Gilson, Jean Duns Scot (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Urin, 1952) pp. 464, 466, 469.

<sup>27</sup> Plato, "Euthyphro," Dialogues i, 383-398.

<sup>28</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, tr. Constance Garnett (New York: Macmillan, 1923), passim.



It follows from the previous considerations that artists, who are after all men, and who have philosophies (which is simply another way of saying that all men have some view of reality--and in mature men these views are coherent and internally consistent)--it follows that their works of art are embodiments of their philosophies, and that, therefore, there can be no theory of aesthetics that does equal justice to the conceptualist Dostoevsky, the materialist Dreiser, the realist Pope, the rationalist Wolfe, the mystic Camus, the idealist Keats, the naturalist Whitman and the pragmatist Rand. The beginning of wisdom in the criticism of literature is to discuss the writer's success or failure in following the criteria of his own philosophy.

## CHAPTER II

### THE AESTHETICS OF CONCEPTUALISM

Easily the most influential schools of aesthetic thought in the history of the Western world are those descending from Plato and Aristotle, which usually go by the names of romanticism and classicism respectively. There is, therefore, a tendency of critics to reduce most works of art to being examples of one or the other of these schools. Unfortunately, a term like romanticism may be misapplied ubiquitously to Wordsworth's naturalism, Shelley's rationalism, Keats's idealism, Blake's mysticism and even (under the theory of guilt by association) Byron's realism, which is poetry with an Aristotelian structure. Byron's famous comment that he preferred a beginning, a middle, and an end rather than to plunge into his work in medias res (the typical gambit of the romantics) is only one of the many Aristotelian hallmarks of his works.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most obvious realistic device in his writing--which should be cited to lay a groundwork for distinguishing realism from conceptualism--is his insistence on maintaining the regularity of his form, and to keep it simple and traditional. Not for him are the sprung rhythms of a Coleridge or a Hopkins. On the other hand, a distinction must be drawn between Coleridge's rationalism and Hopkins's conceptualism. For Coleridge, a poem

<sup>1</sup>George Gordon Noel Byron, Lord Byron, "Don Juan," in Complete Poetical Works (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1905), pp. 747-748. Byron in this passage deliberately distinguishes his intentions from those of his contemporaries by alluding directly to the Poetics in the opening sentence of Don Juan.

progressively reveals what he takes to be a higher truth, and that antagonism between the worlds of form and content can only be asserted by the poet, who destroys by synergy the rhyme and the meter.<sup>2</sup>

In Hopkin's work, however, the violation of the standard rules of rhythm is not a product of the antithesis between the prison of the body and the eye of the mind. Rather, sprung rhythm is the necessary consequence of three levels of meaning in his work, and in these three levels are contained the result consequent of holding a conceptualist aesthetics. It has already been established that the conceptualist accepts both the Aristotelian distinction between will and intellect as well as the Platonic dichotomy between mind and body. To express both these distinctions in poetry, it is necessary to begin with a statement of the will, that is, with a statement about good and evil. This non-artistic, or extra-literary statement comes from the artist himself (note Kant's idea that men make each act representative of all mankind).<sup>3</sup> Such a proposition being a general principle must be stateable in a sensuous milieu. But a sensuous milieu cannot be reduced to an intellectual principle or to the logical form of the work as it would be for an Aristotelian. Many realist poets shy away from specific detail, seeking their poetic truth in universal statements. To argue the truth of this statement in the case of Byron would require a long digression; Pope is a more obvious example of such universality. On the other hand, the conceptualist delights in the sheer joy not only of the sensuous detail, but also in the

<sup>2</sup>For a complete discussion cf. Richard Harter Fogle, The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 49-69.

<sup>3</sup>Such a tendency seems implicit in nearly every applicable page of his writing.

sensuous suggestiveness of the language in which that detail is described. Hopkins delights in words like dappled, minion, vermilion and fretted. Because both the detail and the statements of moral belief are first-premises for him, he simply offers both; they need not be proved.

It follows, therefore, that for the conceptualist in general, and Hopkins in particular, the logical form of a work will be unique. No two works of a conceptualist will be exactly the same in structure, for the function of the structure is to unite a very specific moral principle with a very specific net of sensuous details. A Hopkins line is usually extremely concrete: "As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame."<sup>4</sup> Also he erects variation of meter into a principle; as other writers may vary their rhythms only to avoid monotony, so Hopkins varies his meter as the result both of the external truth he states and of the internal necessity of suiting form to function. But for all the richness of the detail, and for all the complexity of the form, the entire kingfisher sonnet is dominated by the line: "Crying What I do is me: for that I came."<sup>4</sup> It is the only line that is subjective to the artist, whereas every other line is either sensuously objective to him or categorically objective, such as the statements about Christ.

One may gain aesthetic distance from conceptualist literature by referring to the equivalent aesthetics in the other art forms. For example, in the history of painting, the early medieval mystics care nothing for sensuous exactitude. In a given painting may be found a tiny donkey,

<sup>4</sup>Gerard Manley Hopkins, "As Kingfishers Catch Fire Dragonflies Draw Flame," in Poems, 2nd ed. ed. by Charles Williams (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 53.

a medium-sized St. John, and a towering Christ. In short, sensuous detail exists only to express meaning. By the time of Giotto, and the concomitant naturalistic revolution, many paintings exhibit the tortured features of a tortured Christ and a distinctly suffering Mary, both of whom are unique, and the viewer can know them solely from the analogy of the models who posed for the projects. The struggle to bring some formal order into the naturalistic revolution was the work of the Monumentalists--Uccello, Castagno, Piero della Francesca, Perugino, and Mantegna:

While they were all students of the new "realism," (read naturalism) they were even more significant in being bold and original thinkers in the sphere of pictorial design. Their aim was the life-giving disposition of mass, line and color.<sup>5</sup>

This means that they attempted to synthesize naturalistic detail with the underlying idea--which, by definition, is Platonic rationalism.

This romantic "realism" then gave way to the true realism of Leonardo. In the famous Last Supper, the classical form, balance, and structure of the work come close to forcing the observer into calculating so that he can determine which one is Christ. The volitional meaning, the extra-artistic, and the religious dimension are nearly lost in his determination to view his subjects in a perfectly harmonious synthesis. Despite his many artistic virtues, in a Leonardo the viewer searches in vain for the power of the simple, early medieval cartoon of the huge Christ dominating the medium-sized St. John and the tiny donkey.

Michelangelo led the artist of his epoch out of the near banality of form and content without meaning. In one of the most important

<sup>5</sup>David Robb and J.J. Garriso, Art and the Western World. 3rd ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 644.

works, the eighteen foot tall statue of David, with the exception of the right hand, the entire work is carried off in a relatively true-to-life manner. The proportions do not violate what might be reasonably expected in a well-proportioned athlete. Unlike the ancient Greeks, Michaelangelo does not shrink the size of the head to make the muscles appear powerful, but that hand, that right hand, that right hand that held the sling that slew Goliath, that right hand that saved the children of Israel and kept the flame of Judah alive for Christ and Christianity--that right hand is five times the size of the left hand. The moral significance of the work resides in the proportion of the hands. Many people see this statue and understand the importance of it, but only on reflection do they notice the disproportionate size of the one hand, because, if the audience were immediately to spot a gross difference, that very grossness would so offend as to render ineffective the statue as a work of art. By a subtle application of what plastic artists have come to call harmonious distortion, Michaelangelo blends that hand into the whole figure in such a way as to preserve the unity of the total conception.

Michaelangelo's process of harmonic distortion next finds life in the paintings of El Greco. To understand El Greco's work, one may take as an analogy the columnar supports of the Gothic cathedrals. The medieval architects tended to break up the facade of a ten-foot thick column into minute rivulets which appeared as enormous chords aspiring after God. Similarly, El Greco elongates his figures in recognition of the tension in any human being between the downward gravity into the City of Man and the upward pull into the City of God. (A tangential remark is necessary at this point; some critics who evidently practice medicine vicariously

have alleged that they have discovered an astigmatic condition evident in El Greco's work. Anyone who has an experimental bent may view a human figure and a painter's canvas through a lens that distorts a model to make it look taller. Using the same lens to see what he is painting--on the hypothesis that an artist sees his canvas with the same eyes that see his model--the painter will see both his model and his representation as tall and thin, but both would then be shorter and fatter than he sees them. Hence the astigmatic explanation of El Greco's painting is absurd.) His harmonic distortion suffers from only one possible aesthetic objection--that the elongation is too obvious.

The need to distort with subtlety receives its final culmination in Rembrandt. That Dutch master painted in his studio by candlelight, not with one large candle, but with innumerable small candles, each of which was movable to permit its use to distort the expression of the model, or to distort the significance of some part of the model's body. The viewer readily discerns the sensuous detail the artist sees, but he is not the passive receptor of his model. Rather he both receives sensations from the mass which is his model, and he creates in part those sensations by determining where and how the light will fall. Subtly he can make a man into a saint, a fool, or a devil. The dominating spiritual quality of Rembrandt's vision necessitated the invention of such techniques.

Subsequent impressionists and their successors reveal obsessive concern with various experiments with light, but because they lack his vision, they do not fully comprehend the use of lighting. Hence they produce a series of interesting intellectual exercises: Seurat's pointillism, Cezanne's cubism, or Monet's out-of-focus technique.

In Michaelangelo, El Greco, and Rembrandt, there is the grand sweep of conceptualist aesthetics in plastic arts. Alternatively one can turn to architecture to see the naturalistic buildings of Mies van der Rohe, the idealistic structures of Le Corbusier, and the conceptualist houses of Frank Lloyd Wright.<sup>6</sup> An apartment building by Mies, with its massive glass walls, oppressively brings in the entire world to the apartment dweller, who becomes nothing but a naturalistic product of his experiences. Only his tiny bathroom shuts out the world where he stands naked in front of large mirrors which give him to himself as object rather than as subject. Such contemplation correlates precisely with Zen Buddhism.

Zen of course takes the attitude of the object treated objectively ... and... the subject, i.e., the Poet himself as theme, treated objectively ... ordinary people being in the state of... the subject treated objectively ... still wandering about in ignorance of the laws of<sup>7</sup> their being, which govern them even while they wander in ignorance.<sup>7</sup>

If Mies's man is a product of his experience, and his art is an intensification of his experience, then Le Corbusier's man is outside his experience and his art is a revelation of new experiences. He seems to care nothing for the man who lives in his buildings; they confront the inhabitant. If an inmate finds a lavatory perfectly proportioned to its adjoining sink, but neither of them in proportion to his own body, so much the worse for this poor misshapened and misproportioned soul; should he decide to read a book, he might find a beautiful blinding light (like the

<sup>6</sup> cf. Peter Blake, The Master Builders (New York: Norton Library, 1976), passim.

<sup>7</sup> Roger Blyth, Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics. Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1942, p. 71.



one flooding into Plato's cave) assaulting his eyes through a narrow clerestory. It may even remind him of what Edna St. Vincent Millay says somewhere, that burning a candle at both ends makes for a glorious light.

Under the conceptualist maxim "form follows function," a typical Frank Lloyd Wright house does not merely provide a home for the one who purchases the building, but it indicates who he could and should become. It may contain a dramatic kitchen two stories high, reaching through the roof of the house, stage-lit to illuminate it, and it may be surrounded by half-walls, turning the whole work-space, normally a prison, into a stage where the housewife is the star. The half-walls may permit the housewife to be seen from every part of the house. (No woman living in such a Wright house ever rolled into the kitchen in curlers.) One can then enter the massive walk-in fireplace, having no equal since the Table Round. Beside it stands one of Wright's five-foot thrones. Huge four-to-eight-foot deep eaves even project beyond the glass doors, forming a symbolic extension of the occupants' control of the space beyond him. It is the passer-by who feels the domination of the owner, rather than the owner feeling the criticism of his environment. The purpose of Wright's designs is to turn the Willie Lomans who buy them into Siegfrieds. In New York he constructed the Guggenheim Museum for abstract art as a spiral staircase leading up to a skylight whose ribs form an inverted star of David. On the ground floor, a tree grows out of the water reaching up to Guggenheim's Jewish God through the abstract skylight. For the Unitarians of Madison, Wisconsin, Wright built a long church, open only at the apse behind the minister. The apse is only a large picture window, for the Unitarian sanctuary is nature outside the church building.

The vision through that window is a forest, a beach, a lake, and a sky. Again, in Milwaukee, Wright's Greek Orthodox church is an acoustically perfect inverted saucer of stressed concrete over a smaller saucer facing upward, holding the congregation. At the time of construction, the Orthodox Church permitted no musical instruments since only the human voice was allowed to praise God. Thus his acoustically perfect auditorium is an apt expression of Eastern Orthodox theology. The decision for the a cappella choir reflects the ethereal spirituality of the Orthodox Church with its enormous passion for the Holy Ghost.

This mystical aesthetic of music finds counterpart in the rationalism of Brahms, when, true to the principles of German Platonism, he wrote the North German Quartets. In this work, sensuous melodies are dialectically extended into logical harmonies which squeeze these tone-poems into abstruse musical ideas. Finally, a synthesis of mind and body brings back some, but not all, of the original music, and some, but not all, of the logical form--neither being allowed to destroy the other. In the resolution, both sense and reason must limit themselves to provide a compatible vehicle. The beautiful melodies swell just to the point, but not beyond the point, where the form would be lost. Brahms is supposed to have said to the young Mahler, when both of them were watching a rock drop into a pond creating great ripples, "after me, the deluge."<sup>8</sup> He clearly foresaw that a composer like Wagner would go beyond the point where the swelling lyricism could conform to the logic. When the logical form broke down, he knew that the romantic rationalism that he and Wagner

<sup>8</sup>This is an oft-repeated story; whether or not it is true historically does not affect the truth of the statement.

shared must dissolve as it did in the abstract intellectualism of Schoenberg.

Against the rationalism of Brahms and Wagner, the clear, lucid Aristotelianism of Mozart's perfect symphonies imposes sanity in a world of passion. Like Aristotle, Mozart believed in moderation. Each note is clear and distinct, joining together to form a perfectly constructed unity. This is the essence of classicism, it is not that this clear, lucid melody lacks meaning; it is only that the meaning has restraint. Against this dichotomy, or rather to unify both the classical and romantic, Beethoven in the Ninth Symphony creates a new form for the symphony (adding choral poem) in order to bring forth the extra-aesthetic premise. He takes for his text Schiller's "Ode to Joy," the premise of which is "Oh, how happy I am that my God exists." The form which he creates is one that unifies that premise with the sensuous elements that began the symphony. In the previous symphonies of Haydn and Mozart, the fourth movement invariably intends to resolve rather than to transcend the previous movements. Beethoven in transcending his instrumental movements with a chorale to God is following Bach's lead. Bach redesigned many of the musical instruments of his time, and altered many of the musical forms in order to make the music carry his spiritual beliefs. Thus the harmonic distortion necessary to weld the spiritual to the material in a new logical form reveals itself in all the arts.

Conceptualist art is often attacked on the grounds of being programmatic, and clearly it is antithetical to theories advocating "art for art's sake," or that the "medium is the message." Nowhere is this criti-

cism so strong as in the attacks on conceptualist writers as polemicists, and the attempts to rule them out of court. Dostoevsky would have freely confessed that his works were religious polemics; Dickens is nothing if he is not a social polemicist. For Hopkins, the meaning of his poetry is an expression of Dun Scotus's philosophy.<sup>9</sup> What must be understood here is Aristotle's discussion of the uses of language.<sup>10</sup> Language may be used to describe empirical detail; this is the subject of grammar or semantics. Language may be used to describe logical processes as in logic or syntactical considerations. Or language may be used to convince other persons to change their values. This is the function of rhetoric. The conceptualist might easily accuse his opponents of lack of rhetoric, which is to turn their antagonists' charges against them, for rarely is the power of writing in its formal elements. One may generally state that the rhetorical premises of nearly all conceptualist art are statements about religion, sex, or politics. The works of Euripides are the perfect examples of all three--the gods, women, war. He does not shrink from having his deus ex machina literally deliver the deus on stage.<sup>11</sup> If the deity must be invoked to solve the problem in front of the artist, the artist must call for the workman capable of performing the task.

This brings us to another defining characteristic of conceptualist writing: its extreme concreteness. The God of the conceptualist is

<sup>9</sup>W. H. Gardner, "Introduction to the Fourth Edition," The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. xxi.

<sup>10</sup>cf. McKeon, Thoughts, Actions and Passions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), pp. 158-169.

<sup>11</sup>Sir Richard Claverhouse Jebb, "Euripides", Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed. (New York: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1910), ix. 902.

not a being-qua-being, a first principle uncaused, a symbolic meaning of life, the greater conception than which nothing can be conceived--rather his God is the patriarchal Father, not too different from the first bearded patriarch. The conceptualist poet does not demur from real evil. Dostoyevsky's devil, Dante's hell, and Dicken's slums are not mere negations, privations or absences of perfection--they are hovels of hell, as much as in the words of another conceptualist, Francis Thompson, God is "The Hound of Heaven." Dante's prostitute in hell is submerged in a layer of excrement; the stench of the feces is not a privation, not an absence of perfection, nor does it have any connection with the ennui of the modern existentialist.<sup>12</sup>

The conceptualist writer differs from both the Platonists and the Aristotelians by his insistence on using his art as a form propaganda; but it is still necessary to distinguish between the propagandistic art of the conceptualist and the propagandistic art of the materialist. Most readers are familiar with the long and somewhat tortuous novels of Hardy, Melville, James T. Farrell, et. al. The hallmark of these works is their total and absolute determinism, in which the pathetic heroes can only curse a world they never made. As the materialist philosopher shares with the conceptualist both the rich, sensuous detail and the intuitive, extra-artistic premise, the difference between them must be found in the former's acceptance and the latter's rejection of a logical form created to unify the sensuous with the moral. Observe how the sense detail in a Melville, a Dreiser, or for that matter a Norman Mailer, rises up like a rich,

<sup>12</sup>Dante Aligheri, Hell, tr. Dorothy L. Sayers (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1949), p. 185.

pounding, heavy ocean, eternally, dialectically smashing whatever it creates. Such writers are often accused of using grand passion in the place of form. Their very formlessness gives them drama--which is the epitome of their greatness, when they have it. The doctoral candidate, seeking to show his mastery of form, might be excused from even dealing with the materialist school of literature, were it not for the two major exponents of the school: Tolstoy's War and Peace and the tragedies of Shakespeare. In War and Peace we are told that we must reject the view that a man named Napoleon conceived, implemented, and willed to conquer an area named Russia. Rather, we are told that for no fathomable reason a mass of humanity, from urges it did not understand, was impelled to march across half of Eurasia; and then for equally incomprehensible reasons, turned around, and in a disastrous rout, fled.<sup>13</sup> Further we are told that the battles were not won by generals, but were lost by virtue of unforeseen events. The author's allusion seems to be to the old saw that for want of a nail, the shoe was lost... It is to Tolstoy's humanity that we owe the abandonment of this determinism to the maturity of his later works such as Anna Karenina.

In the tragedies of Shakespeare - including Richard III or Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear, Othello--we find that the central characters are personages who look or sound much as one might picture Shakespeare himself at the age when each of the plays was written. From the Hunchbacked Richard III through the star-crossed lovers Romeo and Juliet, to Macbeth destroyed by the prophecy of the witches (the Fates of

<sup>13</sup>Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace, tr. Louise and Aylmer Maude (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), pp. 1253-1263.

the Old Greek tragedy), can be seen a series of heroes whose destruction is an inevitable consequence of forces against which they have no control.

In Othello, the character, Iago--who is clearly an embodiment of Fate--possesses a one-dimensional evil, which is a preliminary study for the less incarnated fate preached by the witches in Macbeth. If in Lear it is learned that people must do as they do, in Macbeth it is learned that people cannot do other than as they do.<sup>14</sup> And once again, a female Iago, Lady Macbeth, plays the role of Fate, guiding Macbeth to his destruction. This digression into materialism was made necessary by the need to distinguish the propagandistic art of the conceptualist, which is grounded in free will, from the deterministic art of the materialist which, even when it has the image of the god of a Calvin or a Spinoza, is indistinguishable from the laws of physics.

The hallmark of a conceptualist fiction is, then, the story of a hero, who by conscious choice of the good (defined by the author) enters into a struggle with evil. It will be seen later that just as a materialist writer often uses an impersonal antagonist, such as society in the hands of a Marxist writer, so at least one conceptualist writer, the one with whom this work deals, uses the impersonal force of the good through whom many characters in the same piece may rise for moments like a parade of Christian saints in their martyrdom, making their small sacrifice in imitation of the great Sacrifice by Him who redeemed us all. The separation of the momentary embodiments of the good from the good itself as an impersonal hero is a necessary device for a pious Christian author who can neither excel the gospel, nor add a jot or title to it.

<sup>14</sup> Lajos Egri, The Art of Dramatic Writing (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), p. 109.

As the conceptualist views morals from intention rather than from objective act, his heroes will blunder, for they hung the last perfect Man on a Cross. His heroes will at times be temporarily bested by evil men whose intention he does not divine, but always it will be with his and their intentions that the reader will be concerned, and as a consequence the conceptualist novel will always be a struggle between good and evil. Yet in spite of this generic struggle, the conceptualist's heroes, as well as his villains, will remain concrete human beings; in other words, people the audience can know. In an analysis of conceptualist art and also of a novel of the author whose work forms the inspiration for this thesis, these areas must be brought to light: 1) the sensuous milieu and the concrete detail that form the area and the character of the gladiators in the particular works, 2) the moral premise, the extra-artistic statement that is being made and for which the author wrote his work, and 3) the formal structure of the work, for only after an analysis of the sensuous and moral elements can the audience discover the rule of proportion or logic which he has created in order to unite the natural with the supernatural. The criticism of his effectiveness must wait until is discovered from the physical and moral elements the body for which they must form a skeleton. Something more needs to be said of this requirement, for criticism most often proceeds from an analysis of form first, and thence to such physical or moral details as may appear within the work. In the conceptualist novel, not to mention conceptualist criticism, the reversal of this process is true; for the individual conceptualist, the discovery of the form is the last and the crowning artistic achievement rather than the beginning. It may be said that the conceptualist discovers



his form in medias res; for that very reason, it is the most difficult part of his artistic creation, and the place where he is most likely to fail. At such times he is quite likely to envy the materialist who can simply allow the grand passion of his milieu to lead whither it will, without needing any unity of these two elements (sense and moral), whereas the materialist is free to occupy the bulk of his work with the sensuous and then to abandon it in a monologue of morality after the fact.

The conceptualist, on the other hand, needs to keep, at all times, both his morality and his milieu onstage and, as a result, his form must always be present to hold the work together. Because his physical details and his conscious moral intent (as expressed in his characters) must constantly interact and affect each other, his artistic form must always be present and yet be unobtrusive, for a common failure of bad conceptualist art is the work whose skeleton is so obvious that it obliterates the body and the soul it was meant to unify. One might readily think of John Wayne's film The Green Berets, which has all the good and evil elements of Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov, yes, and even all the rich detail of the Brothers, but whose skeletal form stands out like the bones on a man whose body has been emaciated by starvation. Where the conceptualist artist has made this scientifically correct but artistically unappealing mistake, his propaganda reduces his performance to little more than a diatribe, pedantic and often unintentionally comic in its banality. It is against this danger of triteness that one should first measure the success of the conceptualist author in the criticism that comes after a consideration of his three foundation elements--sense, meaning, and form.

But there is an opposite danger that will also have to be considered; the opposite of too much bone and too little skin is too much fat on too little form, for a conceptualist work can also be destroyed where the form is not sufficient to give structure to a then too rich detail and too pompous phraseology. William Saroyan has often been accused of static premises like "life is wonderful" which seem a bit weak to carry the artifice of his rich characterizations.<sup>15</sup> In the conceptualist writing which fails in this way, the reader is lost in an over-lush jungle of sensuous delight which drowns the awkwardly placed sermon like a minister ranting against the joys of Tahiti.

To examine an author who avoids both the Scylla of formlessness and the Charybdis of sermonizing, it is refreshing at long last to be able to turn to the work of Charles Williams. In his writing, the sensuous details of his narrative and his moral premise will be traced, leading to discovery of the critical form which he creates to unify the first two elements; and finally we shall consider the fine line, or rather, the taut wire he walks between banality and decadence, and his success in avoiding the Scylla and Charybdis which wait either to engulf him in the decadence of purple prose or to reduce him to the didacticism of a newspaper column.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, p.12.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CONCEPTUALISM OF CHARLES WILLIAMS

The only comprehensive account of Charles Williams's thought to date is The Theology of Romantic Love, by Mary McDermott Shideler.<sup>1</sup> Because so much of Williams's needs elucidation for those who do not feel he speaks directly to their condition, she culls his central doctrines as they are spread out in over forty of his volumes. To discuss the underlying assumptions of Williams, however, it must be assumed that the reader has first garnered a mastery of his explicit ideas. It is beyond the scope and space limitations of this dissertation to explain the massive technical vocabulary in Shideler's explication of Williams's thought. Nevertheless, it is necessary to alert the reader that this thesis presupposes the validity of all of what she has had to say about the meaning of such concepts as the Co-Inherence,<sup>2</sup> Substituted Love,<sup>3</sup> the Way of the Affirmation of the Images,<sup>4</sup> the Way of the Negation of Images,<sup>5</sup> the Beatrician Vision,<sup>6</sup> the Flying Moment,<sup>7</sup> and the Way of Perversion.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Mary McDermott Shideler, The Theology of Romantic Love: A Study in the Writings of Charles Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 61-63, 65-66, 68-69, 79-80, 108-109, 190-191.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 64-65.

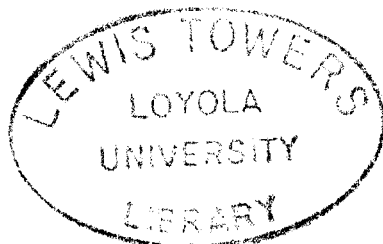
<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 33, 84, 114, 170-171,

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-42.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 115-120

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 121-138.



Quite often a writer who thinks philosophically, whether he is a formal philosopher or a literary man, will compose one short work that sheds light on his whole output. As St. Thomas Aquinas gave us On Being and Essence, as Kant wrote Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, or even as Keats's letters or Thomas Wolfe's The Story of a Novel gives the basic thrust of those authors' thoughts, so the complete shape of Williams's philosophy and theology--even to the possibility of deducing his ethics, epistemology and aesthetics--can be seen in He Came Down From Heaven, his Christology and his discussion of the nature of heaven and its revelation on earth.<sup>9</sup> Early in his argument he reverses the usual insistence on the pure spirituality of the Eternal state: "It is not, of course, possible to deny that heaven--in the sense of salvation, bliss or the presence of God--can exist in space; that would be to deny the Incarnation."<sup>10</sup> This statement, as with everything Williams wrote, is fully orthodox. But it is another "arrangement of doctrine," to use his own charming phrase.<sup>11</sup>

Rather than rehearse the contents of this remarkable book (anyone could do that for himself), it is of more profit to analyze directly the premises that stand behind selected passages, particularly those that directly bear on matters of body, intellect, and will in order to be able to understand his "arrangement of doctrine." Such passages most readily

<sup>9</sup>Charles Williams, He Came Down From Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sin (London: Faber and Faber, 1950).

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., cf. p. 119.

yield meaning to anyone searching for systematic meaning, because often they instantly reveal what an author will admit into his system. For example, because James Joyce in his imaginative literature will admit sense impressions only, he is a naturalist (see Appendix). To show conceptualism it is necessary in an author to demonstrate that he admits each of the three elements. Sense knowledge is real knowledge for the conceptualist; it is not for the realist. Similarly, intellectual knowledge is admissible to the conceptualist in a manner scarcely imaginable to the materialist, whereas the goodness of the will in action transcends all knowledge, a statement unintelligible to the naturalist.

Why then would Williams wish to use another ordering of the Church's dogma? When he refers to using a different "arrangement of doctrine," he seems to mean that the pre-eminence of St. Thomas Aquinas as Universal Doctor of the Church has relegated to obscurity those Catholics who view reality from other perspectives. In the lines quoted, he is insisting on the reality of things physical as part of the full scheme. Indeed, corporeality plays so much a part in Williams that, taken out of context from the rest of his work, some of his essays (were it not for overtly Christian passages) could be mistaken for the thought of D. H. Lawrence. This demand for the reality of incarnation on the part of the optimist Williams would in the hands of a pessimistic Fatalist become Manicheanism, a charge which has been brought against him on occasion.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Francis King, Ritual Magic in England: 1887 to the Present Day (London: Neville Spearman, 1970), p. 112.

Yet no Manichean could write:

The events for which we sincerely implore the fulfillment upon earth are already perfectly concluded in heaven...Heaven then is beatitude and the eternal fulfillment of Will, the contemporaneousness of perfection.<sup>13</sup>

Nothing could be farther from Lawrence or Manicheanism than that statement; in the eternal state, the will reaches its fullness. One cannot tell whether "fulfillment of the Will" in this context (i.e., its object, the Good) means God or his creation. The capitalization would make one tend to think he was speaking of the Omnipotence, but how can omnipotence be fulfilled? The statement appears nonsensical unless one applies what Scotus calls the formal distinction.<sup>14</sup> Either God and his creation are really one (a nominal distinction), or else there is something greater than God, namely God and his creation (a real distinction). But if there were a distinction more than nominal, but less than real, then God and his creation could be separate but one-in-God, paradoxically. By definition, this is what the term conceptualism means, a way of solving the problem of universals without falling into the extremes of realism (Polytheism) or nominalism (Unitarianism), by maintaining that the universal is an ontological concept, having ontological status, a third possibility altogether.

If we examine Williams's sentence quoted in isolation, it is irrelevant whether he is talking about God or his creation when he discusses Will, because whatever is true of God is true of those made in His

<sup>13</sup>Williams, He Came Down From Heaven, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup>Etienne Gilson, Jean Duns Scot (Paris: Libraire Philosophique J. Urin, 1952), pp. 244-246.

image, at least analogously. His Will is metaphorically fulfilled in eternity--because of his own existence--but men can become fulfilled literally, and thus share in the Will. This is classical conceptualism. And Williams next announces that religion is the definition of the relationship between Will and creation,<sup>15</sup> in other words, Will mediates (an intellectual process) between itself and creation (Body). He has avoided the problem of conflict between will and creation which led to many aberrations of theologians. He makes mystery his first principle, as did Scotus, and proceeds.

The supremacy of the will, not only to the body but also to the intellect as well, has serious ramifications in the ordering of the branches of thought. From man's point of view, if the will and its consequent choices and resultant actions are more important than what a man knows, then ethics (or moral theology) will be prior to metaphysics (or sacred theology); beliefs and understanding will always be less important than the setting of the heart to the Good. In terms of the virtues, the Good will always precede the True. This does not mean Williams or any conceptualist disparages the intellect; far from it. He is usually, however, concerned with its possible abuse (what may be called a form of intellectual hedonism); it is far more important, nay (and here is the difference from a Thomist) urgent for him to show the superiority of a good man to one who merely discourses on goodness. A legend states that St. Thomas Aquinas once visited St. Bonaventure; the great Dominican said to the Franciscan, "Where is your library?" The Seraphic Doctor pointed

<sup>15</sup>Williams, He Came Down From Heaven, p. 11.

to a crucifix saying, "There is my library."<sup>16</sup> That statement could have been made seriously only by a conceptualist or a mystic.

It follows that this extreme voluntarism attempts to reveal that the will is free, radically so. Williams takes great pains to show that we are responsible for our intentions (always more important than actions to the conceptualist).

The devil, even if he is a fact, has been an indulgence; he has, on occasion, been encouraged to reintroduce into Christian emotions the dualism which the Christian intellect has denied, and we have relieved our own sense of moral submission by contemplating, even disapprovingly, something which was neither moral nor submissive.<sup>17</sup>

Any shift or motivation for evil from the responsible party draws Williams's ire. Each man is responsible for his own intention.

In a magnificently composed argument, Williams proceeds to discover the relationship among the books of the Bible, its worth as a collection of writings, and the intentions of the men who wrote the individual books: "Setting aside supernatural beings, the central figure of the Old Testament is Israel; the central figure of the New is the Church."<sup>18</sup> This stark dichotomy lets us see that "individuals and companies, and mankind itself, are all finally set in relation to that non-human cause and centre which is called God."<sup>19</sup> Williams tells us that the introduction of evil,

<sup>16</sup> Amplification of this famous story can be found in Etienne Gilson, The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure, tr. Dom I. Trehowan and Frank J. Sheed (London: Sheed and Ward, 1938), pp. 470-495.

<sup>17</sup> Williams, He Came Down From Heaven, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



the severing of will from intellect by the introduction of a contradiction, with the resultant loss in preternatural power, is the given of the Old Bible, and that the rest of it consists of building-blocks to restore mankind's health. This attempt to understand the human race and to find the way to its healing is the sole reason for the scriptures:

By a deprivation of the central idea, and of the personification of that idea, the Bible does not cease to be metaphysics and become literature; it ceases to be anything at all but little bits of literature rather oddly collated.<sup>20</sup>

This is a direct attack on the once rather popular notion of treating the Bible as literature without regard to its religious teaching, a belief that could be held only by one who reads anything merely for its artistic value--a typically idealist tendency. This statement in itself excludes Williams from the camp of those who hold that aesthetics is the primary philosophy.

Certainly there are some books whose words, once we have studied them, seem to demand from us a moral, even a metaphysical assent or dissent. Literary criticism, however, may lead to or even be transmuted into something more intense even than itself.<sup>21</sup>

He goes on to give The Pilgrim's Progress, the Commedia, De Rerum Natura, as well as the Bible, as examples. Williams is in no way diminishing the value of the aesthetic response to these works; but he is placing them in a hierarchy of values, with the moral (or ethical) placed above the aesthetic. The distinction in this passage between "moral" and "metaphysical" requires a comment, however.

At the risk of sounding repetitious, it cannot be too strongly

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

stressed that for the conceptualist, metaphysics may be prior in the sense or first, or fundamental, knowledge; but it is ultimately inferior to ethics, which is prior in the sense of being first known, or the resident of will. The only reason a man lives the truth is that he is good. Evil men avoid it. Typically, for someone who is not a formal philosopher (especially one who lives in a culture dominated by another philosophy-- in this case English Aristotelian realism), a conceptualist will yield hesitantly to received opinion when he does not wish to argue a side issue. In the passage under consideration, Williams is arguing for the superiority of religious responses to solely aesthetic ones. To have further complicated his thought with a digression on ethics and metaphysics would have needlessly compounded the discussion. That he was aware that he was so doing seems likely from his phraseology: "... a moral, even a metaphysical, assent..." introduces the idea of metaphysics tentatively, almost reluctantly, perhaps as an assuagement to skeptical readers who are already being attacked on one front.

Williams offers in the next paragraph, as an aside, a very revealing statement about his own assumptions.

"The famous saying 'God is love', it is generally assumed, means that God is like our immediate emotional indulgence, and not that our meaning of love ought to have something of the 'otherness' and terror of God."<sup>22</sup> Love and goodness are almost interchangeable words to the conceptualist; the mystic would concur. (It should be noted that many of these statements could have been made just as easily by a mystic;

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

no mystic, however, could have as high a respect for intellection for its own sake, or show as much pure rejoicing in the body for its own sake as does Williams.) He is complaining that our intellectual concepts of the Good (love) should more often be checked against the way we experience Goodness. He employs the phrase "a terrible good" e.g., "The Hound of Heaven" in Descent Into Hell.<sup>23</sup> Let it suffice here to say that Williams says that love (goodness, will) is something other and greater than our assumption (intellect) or our emotional indulgence (sense).

By this point, a scant seven pages into the text of He Came Down From Heaven, he has already made his point presuppositionally; the rest of the examples from the book are offered not to belabor the thesis needlessly, but rather to show exhaustively how passages in a book reveal an author's presuppositions when the overt subject matter is another topic. Admittedly, when an author's subject is his ultimate beliefs, his presuppositions are far easier to see; indeed, that is why this book is germane, so that when faced with a novel of Williams, it will be unnecessary to prove anything, but rather to discover how his beliefs affect the plots and characters.

There remains one danger, one that may well require a willing suspension of disbelief. We have argued that each philosophy demands its own aesthetic, that the canons of idealism should determine whether or not, for example, Keats succeeds in Endymion. Whether or no he was politically motivated, Croker (a realist) had no business judging the work on

<sup>23</sup>Williams, Descent Into Hell (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), p. 16.

eudaemonian aesthetic grounds.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, Frederick Crews's Freudianism makes him an admirable judge of the merits of Nathaniel Hawthorne's materialist stories.<sup>25</sup> Even a cursory glance at Crews's prose demonstrates that he, like his subject, is a thorough-going determinist.<sup>26</sup> In a like manner, the critic competent to judge Williams must properly proceed from conceptualist grounds. Shideler certainly shows all the hallmarks, even down to her somewhat highly wrought style (crabbed, if one does not like it), much like Williams himself. The tendency to discursiveness is almost as inevitable in discussing a conceptualist author as is the pull of the critic to be drawn into a Platonic dichotomy when discussing a rationalist author like Shelley. His critics have been compelled to submit to the idea of the divided line even to begin discussing the content of a poem like "Ode to the West Wind."<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps the reason for the tendency of conceptualist writing to become kaleidoscopic, or better, cubistic, is that in order to reason both syllogistically (will-intellect distinction) and dialectically (mind-

<sup>24</sup>John Wilson Croker, Unsigned review, Quarterly Review (April 1818), xiv, 204-208.

<sup>25</sup>e.g. Frederick Crews, The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).

<sup>26</sup>His constant reiteration of Freudian concepts as a means of understanding Hawthorne's inherent Calvinism is only possible because both systems are materialistic.

<sup>27</sup>For a detailed discussion of Shelley's Platonism cf. J. A. Notopoulos, The Platonism of Shelley (Durham: Duke University Press, 1949).

body distinction), the author is often required by the grammatical constraints of language to retrace a point in order to treat it a second time from another angle. As Chesterton said in another context, "An author must be orthodox in most things, or else he will not even have time enough to explain his own heresy."<sup>28</sup> The grammatical structure of English early became dominated by Aristotelian realism, and until recently it came naturally to an Englishman.<sup>29</sup> Logical relationships in clearly related categories, set in three-point logic--these are the mainstays of English prose. A real Platonic rationalist in English prose, like Carlyle and the Cambridge Platonists, appears barbaric because he has been forced to reshape the language somewhat for his own purposes. Hence, such a writer does not read as clearly as a Dr. Johnson, or in our own age, a C. S. Lewis. Lucidity in English, or better, pellucid English prose is the domain of the realist. No purple crowns his prose. Add to these lucid tendencies a desire to bathe in detail, and the pure writing of a conceptualist often repels those out of sympathy with its adherents, and his style may be called either over-wrought, needlessly obscure, or even incompetent. Williams has been called all three.<sup>30</sup> Yet it should constantly be borne in mind that an author who composes in Williams's fashion is not merely entertaining an indulgence; for him to have taken the advice

<sup>28</sup>G. K. Chesterton, George Bernard Shaw (London: John Lane, 1910), p. 8.

<sup>29</sup>Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 91. For several hundred years, every student who attended Oxford and Cambridge Universities was required to master Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics in Greek.

<sup>30</sup>At a special session of the convention of the Modern Language Association held in Chicago (December, 1977), nearly every speaker--all of whom were sympathetic to Williams's content--found something disparaging to say about his style.

of his critics by writing another way would have under-cut the very heart of his thought. It is a testimony to Williams's integrity that he never wavered from his vision nor sought to modify his style.

The discursiveness of the conceptualist may seem almost like free association to someone who does not enjoy his methods of ratiocination. The tendency of the Platonic argument to move from topic to topic is easy to tolerate because the rationalist will usually move from thesis to anti-thesis to synthesis. So may a conceptualist; but he may seize any part of the dialectical movement of an argument, and analyze a portion of it before returning to the main thrust of the dialectic; or he may reverse the process altogether by offering an analysis but, realizing its necessity to the gist of his thought, he might suddenly enter into dialectical debate. To many people this will seem as if he is shifting the grounds for discussion too suddenly. Yet in a successful conceptualist argument, one can break down the argument into its parts and show that each step is necessary, or at least that it is an amplification of the whole.

An example of the use of contraries in a conceptualist argument appears in the second chapter of He Came Down From Heaven, a discussion of the Fall of Man. Williams states, "Will is rather a thing we may choose to become than a thing we already possess--except so far as we can a little choose to choose, a little will to will."<sup>31</sup> The antithesis of the surface statement is obvious: we have already seen man as the image of God, who is pure Will. How then can will (the heart of our nature) be other than what we already are, but "a thing we may choose to become?"

<sup>31</sup>Williams, He Came Down From Heaven, p. 21.

The Fall of Man is the answer, and the synthesis would be that the Fall altered man's ability to know his will. The title of the chapter is "The Myth of the Alteration of Knowledge". The ensuing paragraph should be quoted in full because only a conceptualist, fully conscious of his own position, could have made it. In this sense it is supposition as opposed to presupposition:

The change in knowledge [the Fall] is indicated by one detail. The tale presents the Adam as naked, and in a state of enjoyment of being naked. It was part of their good; they had delight in their physical natures. There is no suggestion that they had not a delight in their sexual natures and relationship. They had about them a free candour, and that candour of joy was a part of their good. They were not ashamed. They then insisted on knowing good as evil, and they did. They knew that candour as undesirable; they experienced shame. The Omnipotence might intelligently know what the deprivation of that candour would be like, and yet not approve it into existence. The divine prerogative could not enter other beings after that manner; they had to know after their own nature. The thing they had involved confused them, because its nature was confusion. Sex had been good; it became evil. They had made themselves aprons. It was exactly what they had determined. Since then it has often been thought that we might recover the single and simple knowledge of good in that respect by tearing up the aprons. It has never, so far, been found that the return is quite so easy. To revoke the knowledge of unlovely shame can only be done by discovering a loveliness of shame [so much for naturalism] (not necessarily that shame, but something more profound) in the good. The Lord, it may be remarked, did not make aprons for the Adam; he made them coats. He was not so sex-conscious as some of the commentators, pious and others.<sup>32</sup>

What is important to notice is that Williams, unlike the Platonist, can imagine an unfallen sexuality totally physical, and good, but he does not stop with the common presentation of the flesh becoming corrupted by the Fall. He makes it exceedingly clear that no guilt was attached to flesh, but that sin was an insistence, an ungratefully chosen act of the will. It was not the intellect that caused the primal curse,

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

because it merely saw the possibilities; actually the intellect's inability to cope with the choice is almost gleefully put before the reader, something an Aristotelian would never do. Further, the inability of man simply to deny the effect of the will on the body is a refutation of naturalism; that he is concerned about body and intellect immediately puts him in a camp other than the mystical; that he does more than simply analyze events denies the possibility of pragmatism. His insistence on free will in the paragraph means that he is not a materialist. Six of the seven alternate positions are refuted in some way by this paragraph; only idealism is left unchallenged, and, as we saw earlier, he had taken great pains in the first chapter to refute idealism.

It has previously been observed that Williams, as an Englishman, primarily faced an audience of Aristotelian realists; thus far he has taken no direct action in discussing the distinction between the will and the intellect, and this understanding is crucial for understanding any conceptualist discussion of human responsibility; a knowledge of good and evil does not make a man moral; that knowledge was the Fall. Morality is not just a compiling of action by habit based on intellectual knowledge and development, Aristotle's and St. Thomas's position; it is a setting of the will on the Way to the Good. Williams calls Babel

that symbolic legend of the effort man makes to approach heaven objectively only, as by the vain effort of the removal of aprons.  
(Italics mine.)<sup>33</sup>

He sees the account of the Tower of Babel in the book of Genesis as a paradigm for the relationship of the intellect to the will:

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 24-25.



unless something is done, nothing happens. Unless devotion is given to a thing that proves false in end, the thing that is true in the end cannot enter (*Italics mine.*)<sup>34</sup>

He almost immediately quotes that paradox so beloved of him, "This also is Thou; neither is this Thou", a statement he attributed to St. Augustine but which no one has to my knowledge tracked down. Again I must refer the reader to Shideler for explication of the Way of the Images if Williams's meaning is not readily apparent; he is assuming the reader's knowledge of his superstructure. One can see without further aid, however, that Williams saw intellectual pride (*hubris*) as the sin of Babel, and offers action submitted in devotion to an Image of something good as proper behavior. Even though an image fails us finally, it is a precursor to the good, as St. John the Baptist was of Christ.

In the peroration of his chapter on the Fall, Williams's prose becomes exceedingly lyrical in his paean to the Goodness of the Lord:

The heavens go before the host, the habitation of the proceeding Power, and of the single voice in and beyond creation that is able to proclaim its own identity, the voice of the original good...It is the law of exchange that advances, of the keeping of one life by another, of the oath that cannot be controlled by man, it is the knowledge of good as good breaking out of the knowledge of good as evil.<sup>35</sup>

Among other things, this is a prose hymn to the Goodness of God's Will, and our participation in that Will.

Once Williams has unequivocally established the superiority of the will to the intellect, he can then proceed to discuss the absolute validity of the mind. Because the will is of greater importance than

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

reasoning does not mean that there is any inherent wrong with the intellect. On the contrary, it is a gift of the Creator, and it should be used to the full:

...it has been...too often [believed] by the pious to encourage... [the faithful]...to say, in love or in laziness, 'our little minds were never meant...' Fortunately, there is the book of Job to make it clear that our little minds were meant. A great curiosity ought to exist concerning divine things. Man was intended to argue with God.<sup>36</sup>

The third chapter, then, on the presuppositional level, is, in part, a discussion of the goodness of the intellect, its powers and its sphere of influence, the previous chapter already having placed it in a secondary role to will. Man should pursue knowledge where it leads him for its own sake but with charity. "Humility has never consisted in not asking questions; it does not make men less themselves or less intelligent, but more themselves".<sup>37</sup> The only danger, he seems to be implying is that haughtiness can lead to belief in intellect as the primary good, as was the case with Job's comforters.

Williams relates the mental anguish of Job to his question's fulfillment at Sinai:

Moses went up into the Mount as myth; he descended as moral teacher. He was a leader in both periods, but there was a difference--as there is a difference in the God to whom he went and the people to whom he returned.<sup>38</sup>

These are unexpected sentences for a twentieth century literary figure to have written. The structure of the first antinomies is a pattern that

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

almost invariably means that the former is inferior to the latter, e.g., "he went away a boy, but returned a man." As a novelist, Williams' stock in trade was mythical materials such as the Graal and the Stone of Suleiman; it was his life's blood in one sense. He could have hardly underestimated the value of myth; but the moral teacher transcends any embodiment of myth. He says that the reason this highest plane of Moses's being is in his role as moral teacher is that "...I AM has sworn that he and it [man's nature] shall be known as good, and only good, to whoever chooses."<sup>39</sup>

The prophets are the inheritors of the Mosaic triumph, keeping alive the spirit of the law and the glory of the Will who gave it. This leads Williams to another of his key asides:

The word glory, to English ears, usually means no more than a kind of mazy bright blur. But the maze should be that of a geometrical pattern.<sup>40</sup>

The framing of the Old Covenant into factual law should be a reason for rejoicing, not an occasion for the characteristic modern objection that morality is a set of cold rules. The glory of God and his Commandments, in Williams's writing, becomes a kind of baroque game, a playing with the immense, much like the juggler in The Greater Trumps.<sup>41</sup> Once again, however, Williams must re-iterate his trichotomy:

...certain patterns in the web of Glory are already discernible; the recognition of the good, everywhere and always, as good, the

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Williams, The Greater Trumps (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1950) In the preface to this edition, William Lindsay Gresham provides a preliminary explication of Williams's Tarot symbolism.

reflection of power, the exercise of intellect, the importance of interchange, and a deliberate relation to the Centre.<sup>42</sup>

A rough translation of this passage into the terms of this discussion might read: we can already tell parts of the pattern of God's intentions even before the Incarnation; they are the ability of people to know the good when they sin while relating its origin to God, to use the mind, and to participate actively with others for the sake of their Creator.

Slowly Williams is preparing us for his understanding of the coming of Christ, and for the neglected doctrines he believes flow from His appearance. But first he must show the anchoring of this revelation in the moral goodness of the Father. "The glory is the goodness, but even the goodness is not he."<sup>43</sup> Rather, the goodness is His Will.

That will must be taught by instructors to his chosen people. The prophets are sent out from the visible mathematics of the glory. Morality is either the mathematics of power or it is nothing. Their business is to recover mankind--but first the inclusive--exclusive Israel--to an effort to know only the good.<sup>44</sup>

Thus the need to instill in the Israelites the fear of the Lord; to make a people whole, to be active witnesses before the whole world by the coming of Messiah. The inculcation of a sense of sin, of the unworthiness coeval with the Fall, was absolutely mandatory because those folk were to bear His witness; but to Williams, sin is only known in operation, and that operation consists of a dreary sameness. The will is only known in act. This Ding an Sich is never known (Kantian conceptualism, of course).

<sup>42</sup> Williams, He Came Down From Heaven and the Forgiveness of Sins, p. 33.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

Sin has many forms but the work is all the same--the preference of an immediately satisfying experience of things to the believed pattern of the universe; one may even say, the pattern of the glory. It has, in the prophets as everywhere, two chief modes of existence: impiety against man and impiety against God--the refusal of others and the insistence on self.<sup>44</sup>

It is in the struggle for perfection by precept that the Israelites lived.

Only the nature of repentance, of forgiveness, remains. "The prophets are too much concerned with their demand for penitence and their message of pardon to have time for metaphysics."<sup>45</sup> Once more ethics reigns supreme, and ontological truth and natural theology are of relative unimportance. Indeed Williams seems almost impatient with analysis that would be only a striving for that knowledge which does not have the perfection of the human will as its aim. "But Ezekiel and his companions are no more concerned with a metaphysical analysis of the absolute than they are with a defence of the myths of a condescended opposition [the anthropomorphic representations of the deity.] They are hammering at the heart."<sup>46</sup>

The effect of his "hammering at the heart" was to be the reward of Israel. Realism teaches the reduction of virtue to the formation of good habits and the avoidance of evil practices, but for Williams the primary point of the old covenant

is the making an inward thing of the law. It is no longer a thing known and obeyed by a difficult decision; it is to become an instinct, a natural desire of body and spirit.<sup>47</sup>

The inclusion of the body is significant; visceral reactions against evil, and a movement of the flesh toward the good without agony was the reward

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

of those that followed the way. This calmness of body and spirit is not identical with the intellectual application of good practices associated with the Aristotelians; in that philosophy, if one knows the good, he must will the good, for no man can will his own evil.<sup>48</sup> Williams denies that position by his understanding of the covenant as something freely chosen or rejected. One can will his own evil in Williams's schemata, as in the philosophy of Duns Scotus. The crux of each choice is how one reacts to the haeccitas (thisness) of a given situation.<sup>49</sup>

After similar discussions of Ecclesiastes, and a portrait of St. John the Baptist, Williams gives us his picture of the Christ. Seldom does he anywhere simply speak of Jesus or Christ. In speaking of God, the Father, he usually uses words like the Omnipotence, the Mercy, the Protection. Of the Incarnate God he prefers locutions like the Divine Thing and the Hero. In a parenthetical statement, he tells us why he so designates the deity:

...it will be remembered that Saint Matthew uses the neuter--that holy thing; students of the Gospel may be excused for sometimes following the example, if only to remind ourselves of what the Evangelists actually said.<sup>50</sup>

In others words, Williams desires to seek an accuracy that is sometimes obscured by well-worn custom. Nor is it too fanciful to assume that his enthusiasm made him seek out terms (like "the Hero") that make Jesus sound like the archetype of an epic figure, because if He was more than hero, he was at least hero as well. Actually most of Williams's account

<sup>48</sup>Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, in Basic Works ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), pp. 935-936.

<sup>49</sup>Williams, He Came Down From Heaven and the Forgiveness of Sin, pp. 29-45.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

of Christ simply re-states the Synoptics in highly colored, joyous prose, and gives something of a mythical cast to the events: little in the account helps elucidate his conceptualism, however.

Several passages, nevertheless, are revealing. Messiah left us only few of His words, but some of them put the nature of morality on a plane higher than that known to Israel.

Half a hundred brief comments, flung out to the mob of men's hearts, make it impossible for a child of the kingdom, for a Christian, to talk of justice or injustice so far as he personally is concerned; they make it impossible for him to complain of the unfairness of anything. They do not, presumably, stop him noticing what has happened, but it can never be a matter of protest. Judgment and measurement are always discouraged. You may have them if you will, but there is a sinister note in the promise that they shall be measured back to you in the same manner.<sup>51</sup>

Higher than the moral precepts of the old Law is the fulfillment of that law in the Christ; what is revealing, and perhaps almost shocking to some, is that Williams seems able to break into lyrical rapture over that stern statement: "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and... with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."<sup>52</sup> This sentence would hardly seem a quick candidate for waxing ecstatic; but Williams delights in the law whenever he discusses it. At times he goes out of his way to posit moral paradoxes and problems where only someone obsessed with the idea of a moral universe could see even the possibility of a trouble. "It is not surprising that Messias saw the possibility of an infinitely greater knowledge of evil existing through him than had been before."<sup>53</sup> The verse he is referring to is "blessed is he whosoever

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>52</sup> Matthew, 7:2.

<sup>53</sup> Williams, He Came Down From Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sins, p. 54.

shall not be offended by me." The denial of what the Christ has done must exceed, or at least intensify, other evil. The Scotist doctrine (which Williams held)<sup>54</sup> is that man was made for the Incarnation rather than the converse, the purpose of all that makes a man human through Christ, because humanity was designed for his coming whether or not there had been a fall. Once a man recognizes Christ as the Chosen, he is fully obligated to pursue the goodness and truth to where his perceptions lead him. To do otherwise does violence to the very order of creation itself. In that way Christ's coming can be a cause for greater evil than if he had not. Williams's statement, then, is specifically Scotist.

The meaning of the Crucifixion is especially a moral one for Williams. Christ attained the knowledge of good and evil as man, but as God he could possess that knowledge without experiencing it; therefore, his act of vicarious suffering for all humanity became all mankind reunited to its maker by the One who was at once God and his Creation.

...the Thing that was man rather than a man, though certainly incarnated into the physical appearance of a man; the Thing that was Christ Jesus knew all things in the deprivation of all goodness....Man had determined to know good as evil; there could be but one perfect remedy for that--to know the evil of the past itself as a good, and to be free from the necessity of the knowledge of evil in the future; to find right knowledge and perfect freedom together; to know all things as occasions of love.<sup>55</sup>

This is a position conceptualists share with mystics; in this passage Williams may possibly have had in mind the meditation of the Lady Julian of Norwich when she said, "all shall be well and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be made well."<sup>56</sup> It was one of Williams's

<sup>54</sup>Schideler, The Theology of Romantic Love, p. 67.

<sup>55</sup>Williams, He Came Down From Heaven and the Forgiveness of Sin, p. 58.

<sup>56</sup>Lady Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love ed. Dom Roger Huddleston, O. S. B. (Westminster, Md: Newman Press, 1952), p. 48.



favorite quotations and he makes frequent reference to Lady Julian throughout his work. In fact, one of his characters in War In Heaven may possibly be named for her.<sup>57</sup> Of course, this view of Christ's eventually reconciling of all evil into good, in what the theologians call aeviternity, is the final result of the felix culpa: "pardon is no longer an oblivion but an increased knowledge, a knowledge of all things in a perfection of joy."<sup>58</sup> Not only will all things be made well, but even in the matter of the pardoning of actual sin, the pardoner must recognize that a desire of the sinner to do the right is all that is necessary in order to forgive. The constant failing, the not doing of sin, can never be a condition of forgiveness because "it would be a slur on intelligence"<sup>59</sup> as well as not a genuine reconciliation.

Here we see the conceptualist differing in moral theology from the realist perhaps more than anywhere else. To a realist, a man is judged by his actions;<sup>60</sup> to a conceptualist like Peter Abelard, evil always lies in the intention.<sup>61</sup> In this way, a man can commit all manner of atrocities and not be guilty if his intentions are not evil; for example, the actions of Torquemada's tortures may have been genuinely meant to help save souls. That he should have been stopped, or that the

<sup>57</sup>Williams, War In Heaven (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966). Julian Davenant, Archdeacon of Fardles, accepts his martyrdom through the course of the novel in an effort to make "all manner of thing well."

<sup>58</sup>Williams, He Came Down From Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sin, p. 59.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>60</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, Basic Writings ed. Anton Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945), ii. 758-761.

<sup>61</sup>Peter Abelard, Ethics tr. D. E. Luscombe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 40-47.

actions were objectively evil are not denied from this point of view. But the state of Torquemada's soul is known only in heaven. This argument applies both ways; say a man attempts armed robbery and the consequences were that his victim found courage and defended himself from assault. The evil of the one occasioned the good of another. This attitude toward morality is vital to the understanding when we come to Williams's fiction.

The remainder of He Came Down From Heaven consists of an exposition of the three basic tenets of Williams's beliefs which he understood to follow from the very fact of the Incarnation: Romantic Theology (the Beatrician vision), Substitution, and the Coinherence of the City. Schideler and, to a lesser extent, Charles Moorman<sup>62</sup> have discussed these so well that it would be useless to tread over this ground again. It should be noted in the context of this discussion that the sight of the beloved as the God-bearing image is, from the beginning, a clear example of genuine knowledge that is of body: "It is a result of the Incarnation that opened all potentialities of the knowledge of the kingdom of heaven in and through matter. 'My covenant shall be in your flesh.'"<sup>63</sup>

Williams does not enter into a needless digression in his argument to talk in terms of academic philosophy in what is really a literary essay on the coming of Christ and its consequences; he seems to recognize Dante as a kindred spirit (conceptualist):

<sup>62</sup>Charles Moorman, The Precincts of Felicity: The Augustian City of the Oxford Christians (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1966), pp. 30-64.

<sup>63</sup>Williams, He Came Down From Heaven and the Forgiveness of Sins, p. 74.

The first encounter with Beatrice had awakened physical, mental and spiritual awareness; later encounters had communicated to Dante moments of humility and pure love, however far he might be staying in them. (*italics mine*)<sup>64</sup>

Williams was not in the habit of applying trichotomies ("physical, mental and spiritual awareness") where they would be gratuitous. At the beginning of the chapter, he had introduced his explanation of theological romantic love by quoting the famous "spots of time" lines from The Prelude.<sup>65</sup> He only attributes to Wordsworth the kind of naturalistic understanding that what the body knows is a form of true knowledge. Often the conceptualist Franciscans made much of their unique doctrine of the form of matter, i.e., matter was truly an object of knowledge. Many other instances could be cited where Williams repeats what he perceives to be the partial knowledge of other philosophical positions. His attitude at such times does not seem one of thinking his position correct and the others wrong; but rather that, as in the familiar fable of the blind men and the elephant, each man understands part of the truth. Where Williams might claim a pre-eminence for his own philosophy is that it readily recognizes the partiality of any truths that can be reached; we never have the whole truth.

Yet it is only in terms of conceptualism that the thought of another conceptualist can truly be known. In explaining Dante's meaning of the term love (as made of the Good), Williams introduces the parallel

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

thought of another of the medieval Franciscans, St. Bonaventure. (Dante was a third order Franciscan.)

About the same time Bonaventure was writing that God was a circle whose centre was everywhere and its circumference nowhere. The diagram of process is clear. Dante is on the circumference, and the things that happen there make a difference to him; he has with them no fixed and equal relation: only he sees the centre. The Love of the New Life is in the centre; to it all parts of the circumference, all times, all experiences, have this equal relation. In humility and goodwill Dante answered Love when things went well, but Love answers Love however things go. But beyond that is the state where there is in effect, no circumference; or rather, every point of the circumference is at the centre, for the circumference itself is caritas, and relation is only between the centre and the centre. This is love-in-heaven.<sup>66</sup>

It has seemed advisable to quote this paragraph in full, because we can now see that without an understanding of the conceptualist position (at least in the flesh, as Williams himself might have said), these words are utter gibberish. So understood, they become perfectly and easily intelligible. It seems like a celebration of physical love--but then the end result is love-in-heaven; it could be Plato's divided line, but what is below the line is good in itself. He seems to reach for universal truth, but with full knowledge of particularities. No wonder Williams perplexes and defeats so much of his audience. It is like the readers of Dante who try to allegorize Beatrice into a representation of Theology. She is a representation of Theology; the reason she is a representation of Theology is because she was Beatrice first, a girl who lived and died in Florence, a girl whom Dante Aligheri loved and celebrated.

To understand fully the theology of romantic love as Williams and Dante expounded it, the student must learn to participate in acts of Christian charity:

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., pp. 76-77.

But it is hardly possible to follow it without proposing and involving as an end a state of caritas of the utmost possible height and breadth, nor without allowing to matter a significance and power which (of all the religions and philosophies) only Christianity has affirmed.<sup>67</sup>

Such acts of the will take the natural state of inter-personal human relationships and elevate them to the status of divine deeds.

Williams, however, was fully aware of the possible dangers of the Affirmative Way:

A theology of this kind...will give rise (within itself) to heresies. Extremists of one kind will claim for the beloved a purity as non-existent as the purity of the Church militant upon earth.<sup>68</sup>

All heresy, from this view, is the result of keeping a morbid imbalance among the elements of human experience whether physical, intellectual, or moral.

The rigor with which the lover pursues the way of love can lead to several possible pitfalls. Important in the context of this discussion is "the assumption that the Beatrician state is everlasting..."<sup>69</sup> The drive to physicality alone, which easily leads to perversion and despair, besets the human condition. The body may be good in and by itself; the minute it becomes isolated from the rest of experience, it asserts a dominance in excess of what it is able to deliver. The devotion of the lover must be undertaken with humility, so that he or she may understand what it learns from the beloved and be prepared to return to life refreshed and with new life (vita nuova).

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., pp. 77-78.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

Another problem can arise from intellectual snobbery; the lover thinks the sight of the beloved private property; but, "love does not belong to lovers, but they to it."<sup>70</sup> To defeat jealousy--the intellectual pride of romantic love--the mind must be brought into a right relation to the limitations of the beloved. Jealousy "is, always and everywhere, idolatry; it is a desire to retain the glory for oneself, which means that one is not adoring the glory but only one's own relation to the glory."<sup>71</sup> The kingdom of heaven perceived in the beloved becomes, then, a perverted parody when not directed to its proper end. "A sin which is, by its essence, destructive of goodwill is worse than a sin which need not be, in its essence, more than disordered goodwill."<sup>72</sup> The flame of love comes only to those who choose to see it; the will must guide.

A discussion of the doctrine of substituted love, that is, vicarious suffering freely entered into by willing participants in the imitation of Christ's suffering--the doctrine is easily the most controversial of any Williams held, and conceptualism has direct bearing on the essence of that doctrine. His readers, even his Christian readers, who seem reluctant to give credence to the doctrine that one person can assent to taking on the sufferings of another should try to learn the meaning of the word empathy; in its origins, the word has all the strength of the literal bearing of another's burdens. This is the moral heroism of Kant

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

and the commandment of Donne, to seek not whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee. Several statements Williams makes along the way, i.e., in He Came Down From Heaven, bear emphasis. He mentions that the self who attempts the converted way "was to be removed and renovated, to be a branch of the vine, a point of the pattern. It was to become an article of love."<sup>73</sup> Thus, as soon as he addresses the subject, love is defined as the otherness of God. In other words, the convert must be remade into the desire and will of his Creator, which is the spilling over of love into joy, the Commandment to people to love one another. Men are to enter into a pattern of God's love in the same way that they were made in His image, and as Christ has taught our minds and bodies:

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 substitution. We are to be substituted and to bear substitution. All life is to be vicarious--at least, all life in the kingdom of heaven is to be vicarious.<sup>74</sup>

This is the true righteousness the Pharisees never understood, and their failure is the reason Christ condemned them.

The Church has recognized a form of substituted will in the rites of infant baptism in which the will and intuition of the sponsors enter the eternal state to co-mingle with the will and intention of the child's soul. Williams uses this example to show how substitution forms part of the very pattern of sacramentalism, and that the effect on the soul is the result of will and intention.

<sup>73</sup>ibid., p. 86.

<sup>74</sup>ibid.

Part of the fact which such an exhibition ritually and sacramentally presents is the making a commitment of oneself from another's heart and by another's intention. It is simpler sometimes and easier, and no less fatal and blessed to do it so; to surrender and be offered to destiny by another rather than by oneself; it is already a little denial of the self.<sup>75</sup>

From this point of view, even to lend a book is a step toward entering the kingdom of heaven. Here Williams lifts to a principle the typically conceptualist love of the Divine viewed in what would never appear momentous (like Hopkins rejoicing in rose-moles).<sup>76</sup>

When Williams enters into a discussion of techniques for putting into practice the doctrine of substituted love, he immediately draws a tripartite distinction among the contractors' obligations. Conceptualism can be doubly seen here because the three parts have a body, intellect, and will equivalency; and he speaks in terms of what is morally obligatory. The persons entering into an agreement to sharing burdens must know what the burden is. This constitutes a knowledge of the physical sensations. Next, the second party must give up the burden; to the person taking on the burden, the result would be an intellectual awareness of the desire of the other to have his burden undertaken. Finally, the one who takes the burden must indeed accept it; this acceptance is an act of pure will.

The one who takes has to set himself--mind and emotion and sensations--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.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>76</sup>Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Pied Beauty", in Poems 4th ed., ed. by W. H. Gardner and W. H. MacKenzie (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 69.

<sup>77</sup>Williams, He Came Down From Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sin, p. 89.



What we have here is the doctrine of the scapegoat, combined with the doctrine of the imitation of Christ. The reader is exhorted, albeit by literary devices, to take up the suffering of all his fellow human beings, just as Christ took up the sufferings of all mankind; in other words, he is asked to participate in the perfect imitation of Christ.

Williams's expression of this doctrine could have been made only by someone in the Franciscan tradition, Franciscan because an inordinate number of conceptualists have been attached to Francis of Assisi and the order he founded: Duns Scotus, St. Bonaventure, and Dante are the prime examples. Williams employs the early Franciscans as exemplifications of the idea of good will in acts of substituted love:

All goodness is from that source [the Messiah], charged and exchanged in the process. It was said of the Friars that one went patched for another's rending, and in the kingdom men go glorious for others' labours, and all is grown glorious from the labor of all.<sup>78</sup>

Williams asserts that a person must deny the self, but to him the Fall means we must work to co-inhere in nature once more, not simply to overcome it; this process invites all decent men to enter the communion of the saints, because we are unable to save ourselves:

the only thing that can be ours is the fiery blush of the laughter of humility when the shame of the Adam has become the shyness of the saints.<sup>79</sup>

To enter such a communion, men form societies, the City as Williams invariably calls it. Recognizing that ordinary moral effort is

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

not enough because such effort is usually fraught with pain, he makes clear that the moral effort he prescribes is not that of the materialist Stoics; "It is not enough to be full of an effort towards good will unless it is a joyous goodwill."<sup>80</sup>

The final chapter is an attempt to demonstrate the idea of the City of Man in conceptualist terms; the great bishop of Hippo, a Platonic rationalist it will be remembered, thought the body was something to be overcome, that the City of Man was to be superseded by the City of God. Williams, contrariwise, envisions the Cities as they interpenetrate each other. Suffice it to say that if individual men can exchange parts of their being in acts of substitution, societies--which are collections of men--may enter into acts of exchange as well. Further, the communion of the saints, pictured from this perspective, is then the co-mingling of the City of Man with the City of God--the Churches militant, suffering, and triumphant.

Inevitably, Williams must address himself to the problem of suffering; even though theologians avoid blaming God for evil, Williams's conceptualism places the responsibility on the Creator of all. Even if evil were a privation (which a conceptualist is not willing to concede), then that privation paradoxically was integrated into the nature of His creation: He understood suffering, pain, fear, death, sin, evil. He created:

<sup>80</sup>  
Ibid., p. 95.

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.<sup>81</sup>

Such an outburst could easily turn into a prelude to despair. What saves the Christian conceptualist from this invidious sin is his orthodox position that the Incarnation became God's sharing of this condition with his creation; He was willing to enter into suffering and death, and by His Resurrection redeem us. But to deny God's part in evil is at best an evasion: "The pious have been--as they always are--too anxious to excuse Him; the prophet was wiser: 'I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.'"<sup>82</sup> Evil is real to a conceptualist.

Thus human duty is to pursue the way of his Creator, our wills conforming to His Will. "There is only one reason why anything should be loved on this earth--because God loves it."<sup>83</sup> To accomplish this end, it is imperative for a man to change his actions to conform to God's commandment: "To think of the pattern is not to be part of the pattern; to talk of exchange is not to exchange".<sup>84</sup> Here, in the conclusion of his discussion, Williams drops any pretense that he is primarily analyzing, and concludes, as a conceptualist will, with uncompromising exhortation,

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

proclaiming that men should have a change of heart, and he tells his reader that our separation from God is attributable more to our evil intentions (which can only be rectified by adhering to Christ's will) than to anything else. The problem can be overcome by the honest person allowing his will to fade away from him through repentance and prayer.

Thus,

...the schism of intention is deeper than any other; where is certainty? who can be sure of any motive in any act? [It is axiomatic to the conceptualist that one man never knows the intention of another. It is to be remembered that Socrates refused to serve on a jury for this reason.] Yet the choice, the wish that may become the will, may be there, whatever our ignorance; to desire to follow the good is important, to desire to follow the good from the good is more important.<sup>85</sup>

What then is the moral duty, the highest good to this Christian conceptualist? It is to believe (body), to define (intellect) and to accept God by not being offended by Him (will); with these considerations in mind, it is possible both to realize why Williams has been misunderstood by his critics, and to demonstrate the internal coherency of his imaginative art.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CRITICAL RESPONSE TO CHARLES WILLIAMS

The monumental task of discovering the presuppositional thought of Charles Williams--a task which has generally intimidated his critics--has been heroically undertaken by R. J. Reilly. Ironically, Reilly is unable to pin down Williams to any of the standard pigeon-holes that typically categorize philosophical thought:

It is perhaps worth remarking here on the eclectic quality of Williams's thought. So far as he is a transcendentalist, he is within the great stream of neo-Platonism; so far as he is an occultist, he is part of a minor eddy of the same stream. But his evaluation of the body and of matter, his insistence on the goodness of matter, place him closer to the tradition of medieval Aristotelianism.<sup>1</sup>  
(italics mine)

Reilly might have avoided the imprecision of the term "eclectic" by pushing his analysis a step further. Nor is Reilly's quandary an isolated case; as perspicacious a writer as Thomas Howard has implied as much in describing Williams's ideas.<sup>2</sup> In fairness to these men, who are literary scholars, it should be noted that philosophers and theologians seldom recognize the separateness of conceptualism from other systems;<sup>3</sup> in a like

<sup>1</sup>R. J. Reilly, Romantic Religion: A Study of Barfield, Lewis, Williams and Tolkien (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1971), p. 166.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Howard, "Charles Williams's Experiment in the Novel", Dissertation, New York University, 1970, pp. 11-12.

<sup>3</sup>William Turner, History of Philosophy (Boston: Ginn, 1929), pp. 287, 391.

manner (no matter what his reputation in other areas) as insightful a historian of German philosophy as was Dr. Rudolf Steiner discusses Kant as if he were a failed idealist, not fully recognizing the tripartite nature of Kant's thought.<sup>4</sup> It comes as no surprise to find that a conceptualist who is also a man of letters will tend to confound his critics.

Therefore, it is desirable to examine Reilly's analysis of Williams's thought in some detail. Reilly observes that Williams was a man "to whom the unity of things had been revealed--but revealed by natural means, exciting moments of imaginative insight."<sup>5</sup> By itself, this could mean something like Wordsworth's "spots of time," and so it does. But Williams, in distinction from the early Wordsworth, was an orthodox Christian, "a religio-literary phenomenon."<sup>6</sup> Without a deeper understanding, Williams might be classified as an orthodox naturalist, a twentieth-century William of Ockham or Roger Bacon who also composed literary creations. But according to Reilly: "What we find in Williams's work is emphasis on the union of the intellect and the imagination as the highest means of reaching religious truth."<sup>7</sup> This further plunges Reilly into the trouble of classification, and forces him to seize somewhat arbitrarily on the term transcendental to describe Williams.

<sup>4</sup>Rudolph Steiner, The Philosophy of Freedom: The Basis For a Modern World Conception (Spring Valley, New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1964), pp. 49-53.

<sup>5</sup>Reilly, Romantic Religion, pp. 150-151.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

Central to transcendentalism, as Reilly defines it, is the typically Franciscan doctrine, expounded most fully by Duns Scotus, that the world exists for the Incarnation rather than the more usually held converse; in no way does holding such doctrine offend orthodoxy, but it does offend both Thomistic realism and Augustinian rationalism, and has been shunted aside by the adherents of both schools. What follows logically from holding that the Creator desired Incarnation from all eternity is admirably put by Reilly himself when describing what Williams believed:

The universe, including the unity Man, is to be seen as a vast interlocking web of glory; all things manifest God in their degree; the hills skip for joy and the sons of God shout his praises. All things, man included, are glints of God; He is not in all things, but, as it were, behind all things; the creation is an array of masks or images of God.<sup>8</sup>

Each part of creation images its Creator as the images of a poem echo the author's mind; but the great Author gave his images life in existence as well as in essence. The duty of man is to participate in that "web of glory". Thus the very nature of existence, for Williams, may be nearly paraphrased by the Scholastic definition of accident as that to whose nature it belongs to exist by virtue of another. "All things, it may be said, are accidents existing by virtue of each other and by virtue of the substance (the only substance) of the co-inhering trinity of God".<sup>9</sup>

Etienne Gilson's analysis of the Subtle Doctor in The History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages, makes clear that Reilly's paraphrase of

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 153-154.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

Williams is a Scotist statement and, therefore, is a conceptualist position.<sup>10</sup> But philosophers have as much trouble with Duns as they have with Kant, or that literary critics have had with Williams.

Actually Reilly is the only critic that has recognized a similarity of approach between Williams and Kant, though he does not draw the full implications of his observations.

Though Williams rarely mentions Kant, he seems to hold the Kantian notion that time is a mode of perception; we reduce the timeless to temporality and sequence because otherwise we could perceive nothing. Strictly speaking, past, present and future are relative and provisional terms. Existence operates in timelessness: the past and the future are happening. The practices of substitution/empathy in Kant and interchange can and do operate in the past as well as in the present and future.<sup>11</sup>

This paragraph reads as a gloss on a central aspect of the thoughts of both Kant and Williams. Reilly's purposes do not impel him to pursue the Kantian parallels further. Had he more tightly defined a conceptualist tradition, he would have detected consistency.

Another author has listed a number of Williams's reading interests and dubs the list with the increasingly ubiquitous appellation "eclectic".<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York: Random House, 1955), pp. 454-464.

<sup>11</sup> Reilly, Romantic Religion, pp. 155-156.

<sup>12</sup> Mariann Barbara Russell, "The Idea of the City of God" Dissertation, Columbia University, 1965, p. 12. Here is the relevant passage: "Charles Williams's approach to most of his central ideas was...an eclectic one. In developing his central ideas, Williams selected from religious and philosophical systems, from history, and from literary works of all ages. Thus, Williams can be said to lack an acute historical sense because he is not seeking to place an idea in the context of its age so much as to relate the particular idea to what he considers a basic pattern of reality".



Her list, as with the list of projects Williams's initiated in his publishing career, shows he had nearly single-minded interest in conceptualist and mystical writers. He was the first professional editor of the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, the first editor of a major house of an English-speaking firm to promote the writings of Kierkegaard, and he edited Evelyn Underhill's letters.<sup>13</sup> His devotion to the Lady Julian of Norwich, his Dantean scholarship, his persistence in adhering to the Scotist doctrine of the Incarnation, his nearly single-handed resurrection of Thomas Traherne and Coventry Patmore, and indeed his enthusiasm for any author who saw images of the divine in concrete nature--all these form an unmistakable pattern and a unity of vision no critic has previously noticed. When Pauline Anstruther enters the timeless state of her ancestor in Descent into Hell, and her aveternity accepts the burden of his fear so that he can be martyred without fear four centuries earlier--when this happens, Williams is not merely indulging in fantasy or mere pious speculation. He is portraying in action a doctrine held by religious conceptualists.<sup>14</sup> Only the Fall, so the argument runs, prevents these perceptions from being common knowledge: "The nature of the transcendental, interlocking universe is good, as it is a divine facade".<sup>15</sup> In the discussion of Shadows of Ecstasy, more will be said about perception of time and space. It should

<sup>13</sup>Alice Mary Hadfield, Introduction to Charles Williams (London: Robert Hale, 1959), pp. 125-126, 181.

<sup>14</sup>Charles Williams, Descent Into Hell (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 168-171.

<sup>15</sup>Reilly, Romantic Religion, p. 156.

be pointed out here that nearly every Williams character achieves salvation or damnation by choosing how and why he enters time and space in a particular novel's action. Two more examples: in The Place of the Lion, Adam Durrant rectifies the cleavage of nature by choosing to allow himself to become a vehicle for the Platonic intelligences to return among the Forms.<sup>16</sup> In Many Dimensions, Clohoe Burnett gives herself to the Stone to bring the separated elements of the divided stone to unity--thereby accomplishing her own salvation, whereas Sir Giles Tulumuly tries to divide the stone for himself and is both physically and morally undone.<sup>17</sup>

Of course, such occurrences in novels partake of romance, and Williams is nothing if not a confirmed romantic, in whatever sense one may wish to use that much maligned term--whether he is to be considered a writer of romances, or whether he exhibits the hallmarks of a nineteenth-century romantic. But Reilly observes that "Williams's romanticism is what might be called a 'corrected' romanticism,"<sup>18</sup> i.e., he brought his orthodox Christianity to bear on the romantic tradition. Uncorrected romanticism in this context would consist of that myopic view that dwells on this world without regard for theological truth of any kind: "If Wordsworth had been content to revel in the experience of nature which haunted him like a passion instead of looking for its meaning, he would have been

<sup>16</sup>Charles Williams, The Place of the Lion (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 192-206.

<sup>17</sup>Charles Williams, Many Dimensions (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 235-246.

<sup>18</sup>Reilly, Romantic Religion, p. 159.

an uncorrected romantic."<sup>19</sup> Thus, Williams often borrowed the phrase "the feeling intellect" from Wordsworth; in other words, feeling (body) must fuse with intellect, and the whole be ordered to the teleological purpose (will); once again we have backed into the primary definition of the conceptualist position as it has been described above. Williams has thus achieved the goals and refuted a famous argument of his friend T. S. Eliot, and Reilly recognizes the fact:

If we may borrow Eliot's phrase, we may say that Williams's true romantic is one in whom there can be no 'dissociation of sensibility', one whose thoughts are experiences which modify his sensibility. In Eliot, however, the unified sensibility serves largely as a faculty for the writing of poetry. In Williams, the union of thought and feeling serves...as a means of arriving at religious truth.<sup>20</sup>

The central passage that clearly demonstrates that the thrust of Williams's thought can only be understood through conceptualistic analysis is the one in which--as if so often the case, from Peter Abelard forward--the critic seems to view his subject as a muddled Platonist, as if he misperceived the Platonic Tradition; Reilly does not see the Scotism in his description of Williams's position. This "arrangement of doctrine"

...makes one point very clear: it is not possible to regard matter as in any sense evil. If the Fall necessitated the Incarnation, then one may be Platonist enough to hold that Christ's love for man enabled Him to take on 'even' matter to save him; it is possible to retain the Platonic view of matter as evil and the body as punishment...But if the Incarnation would have occurred even without the Fall, then this possibility no longer exists. We can no longer be pained that God had to assume matter; and therefore, any indignity we see either in His

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 160-161.

assumption of matter or in matter itself must derive not from the object, matter itself, but from our misconception of it. In fact, it seems to follow that the usual view of matter as somehow less than spirit is simply a result of the Fall, part of our postlapsarian blindness.<sup>21</sup>

Because he does not perceive the fundamental difference between the conceptualist view and Platonism, this admirable summary of what Williams did genuinely hold as truth, a recapitulation of the Scotist and Bonaventuran doctrine (indeed, the Franciscan doctrine) of the Incarnation, is called "tenuous".<sup>22</sup> If a critic as sensitive to theological literary creation as Reilly can only feel tenuousness and unclarity from this theological perspective, is it then surprising that almost all Williams's less philosophically attuned critics feel that they need apologize for his obscurity and "fuzzy sentences" as Charles Huttar said at the 1977 M. L. A. conference special session on Williams? In Williams's case, non-philosophical or non-theological approaches fail to come to grips with his context, and like a true conceptualist philosopher, Williams is unable or unwilling to compromise; the critic must meet him on his own grounds. Reilly objects to this but calls his objection minor.<sup>23</sup> Were such contradiction in the nature of the created universe to run rampant through Williams's corpus, it would do violence to the validity of his work; at any rate, the objection is far from being "minor". And Reilly sees it himself when he observes that, for Williams's "virtues exist in the body as truly as

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

in the soul, though differently."<sup>24</sup> If virtue resides in the body as well as in the soul, then that body is good, and our physical natures have goodness in their own right, and are a genuine mode of knowing. Or as Williams said in his poetry, "Flesh knows what spirit knows, but spirit knows it knows--categories of identity."<sup>25</sup>

Such unity of flesh and mind leading to vision is precisely what led Williams to Dante, in whom he found a kindred spirit. From the previous discussion of Williams's conceptualism, it need not be stressed very hard what Reilly unwittingly reveals about Williams in this passage:

It is in Dante, Williams thinks, that we find the first and greatest 'true' romanticism: the union of thought and feeling leading to beatitude [will], the theologizing of the romantic experience as it came to Dante from the troubadors' treatment of courtly love.<sup>26</sup>

From this point of view, the art of Charles Williams is an attempt to achieve the same unity of vision as Dante's in a contemporary context and to engage the reader in a spirit of caritas. This Christian love he always sees as moral duty, "...duties to be performed, Christian duties to be done in and through love."<sup>27</sup> It is the rare man who rejoices in individual moral obligations; they are the stock-in-trade of the conceptualist. "After the visions come the duties; but the duties are only made possible by that vision."<sup>28</sup> A character in a Williams novel almost invariably

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>25</sup>Charles Williams, The Region of the Summer Stars (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 26.

<sup>26</sup>Reilly, Romantic Religion, p. 169.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

confronts or shies away from his moral responsibility. Laurence Wentworth's increasingly sinister refusal to participate in the world culminates in his acceptance of a succubus and total idiocy in the "ever-narrowing circles of the void."<sup>29</sup> The Archdeacon of Fardles gives himself to the Truth and Goodness of the Holy Grail though it means his physical death.<sup>30</sup> In each case, a character accepts or rejects God in his confrontation with physical truth.

The immanence of God taken together with His transcendence was emphasized over and over again by Williams; in countless passages he stresses that when confronted by an image, it is the duty of a man to remember "This also is Thou; neither is this Thou."<sup>31</sup> He was neither engaging in speculation, nor in an effort to retain a merely intellectual balance. Williams means that immanence and transcendence must be seen in all creation to achieve a proper love of God. If this is true, it clears up what Reilly implies is a potential scandal in the heart of Williams's thought:

If Williams is right, then Dante loved, not Beatrice, or not only Beatrice, but God-in-Beatrice; more accurately perhaps, in view of Williams's insistence on the Athanasian creed, Dante loved Beatrice-in-God. Bluntly, he loved both woman and God at the same time in seemingly the same way. Eros and agape merge: a single human affection may encompass both God and man.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Williams, Descent Into Hell, p. 222.

<sup>30</sup>Williams, War In Heaven, (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1949), pp. 281-290.

<sup>31</sup>Williams, The Descent of the Dove, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), p. viii.

<sup>32</sup>Reilly, Romantic Religion, pp. 183-184.

Yet Reilly fails to see that it is the love of Beatrice in Dante that upholds balance, and he further claims that the Williams-Dante view tips the scales toward immanence:

Even if we distinguish as carefully as the Athanasian creed does between substance and person, the identification of Beatrice and God seems hardly avoidable.<sup>33</sup> (*Italics mine*)

This statement simply is not true; that which transcends an immanent manifestation is the eternity of that person, what there is of the Creator in the creature. In one way, after the conceptualist hierarchy of first principles is established can anyone ever really confuse creature with Creator? It is scarcely possible.

Etienne Gilson has repeatedly pointed out the differences between the Western theology of being (I am who am) and the Eastern theology of images (man is made in the image and likeness of God);<sup>34</sup> this greatest of modern Thomists has stressed that the commingling of sentences from one of these theologies into the corpus of the other has almost invariably led to heresy, but that no such heresy need occur where each of these theologies is restricted to its own area. Most Western critics, that is to say, most writers available to us, are product of the theology of being; Reilly, from the philosophy of being, finds potential heresy in Williams's work, but it is Reilly himself, by his importation of the philosophy of being into Williams's theology of images, that has created the mischief.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>34</sup>Gilson, History of Philosophy, p. 70.

Further, Reilly does not recognize the conceptualist creation of a new form, what might be called the in-Godded novel-romance: "The 'occultism' of the novels prevents their being taken seriously as examples of romantic theology or of theologized true love."<sup>35</sup> This does not seem to follow. Why do the devices of myth discount the presentation of a theological attitude with characters that manifest those attitudes in an extension of the novel form? That such a procedure produces a new form (a bastardization if it is not liked, a synthesis of novel and romance if it is) is only another way of saying that Williams's conceptualism forces him to create form, as was anticipated by the discussion in the chapter on aesthetics. The straight-forward novel does not permit a steady depiction of the supernatural that appertains simultaneously in mundane physical action; the romance does not allow for the psychological effects of the supernatural on three-dimensional characters. To engage the advantages of both genres, Williams must create his own sub-genre. To those unaccustomed to the body-intellect-will trichotomy, Williams's novel-form requires a slight restructuring of aesthetic acceptability. By Reilly's criterion, if we eliminate Simon the Magician from All Hallows' Eve because of his occultism, Simon Magus should be removed from the Acts of the Apostles; the skulls of children that still occasionally turn up at the site of Giles de Rais' estate testify to the genuine use of the occult by those with perverted senses of power. Williams imagines such power unleashed in the twentieth century; the geometrical increase in the

<sup>35</sup>Reilly, Romantic Religion, p. 184.



amount of satanism rampant in the world in recent decades has proportionately increased the relevancy of Williams's fiction to the modern condition and decreased any chance of accusing him of inventing plots implausible or bizarre.

Reilly further attempts to shake the foundations of Williams's thought by accusing him of a possible misinterpretation of Dante:

But it is a commonplace that the medieval habit of thought was incurably analogical: it saw most earthly things as analogues of heavenly things, and what it saw in this was as a matter of course without, as it were, premeditation.<sup>36</sup>

He cites Guido Cavalcanti as an example of another poet who says much the same as Dante, which is somewhat true; but Cavalcanti focuses our attention not on the blessedness of the lady in her physicality, but rather he feels that she is blessed because of her body, which is a difference precluding theologizing. Nor has anyone tried to theologize the mistresses of Cavalcanti. To the degree his imagery approximates Dante's, Cavalcanti is to that extent a lesser Dante. Yet Reilly claims that

...what Williams seems to ignore in his continual citation of Dante as a teacher of the Way of Romantic Love is that Dante, in treating love philosophically and even theologically, was doing no more than the other writers of his school.<sup>37</sup>

True, but he did it best, and through the ages recognizably so, becoming the Model for men of the Romantic way. Dante fused theology and physical love in a conscious manner. The lovers follow the Way without reflection: flesh knows what spirit knows/ but spirit knows it knows...

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

As Dante's career presents the paradigm for the conceptualist literary man, Williams is the man who recognizes that pattern across seven centuries. Yet Reilly--who again, it must be re-iterated, has come closer than any other critic to understanding Williams's philosophical approach--Reilly shows an innocence of the nuances of conceptualism by claiming that if Beatrice is more than Beatrice she was not personal, and thus undermines Williams's romantic theology. If Dante merely articulated what was implicit in his fellows, the pseudo-problem collapses; and if Williams explained that vision to his own generation, recognizing Dante as a man on the same path, then all is consistent and coherent. And, indeed, Reilly, in his succeeding paragraph, sees that Beatrice and the characters of Williams must follow the path to moral duty and he is disappointed. (He fails to see the internal consistency also.)

... the only real objection ... to Williams's--and Dante's--system ... is not theological but purely natural and human: it seems disappointing as its analogue, the Christian religion, so often seems disappointing. It seemed at the outset to promise so much for daily living--for the time being--because it deals with one of the truly unforgettable experiences in human life.<sup>38</sup>

He is referring to love between the sexes; it leads to loving one's neighbor, marriage, the rearing of children, all that is "unexciting" to those people seeking novelty. Lies, a conceptualist would say, are novel; the truth is mundane. Its very mundanity creates its beauty. And though Reilly may be disappointed, he also can see the other side of what the subjection to moral duty means:

...all nature, including human nature, is an image of divinity, a reflection of God...all things are reminders of God, like Whitman's grass, a handkerchief of the Lord divinely dropped.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 187-188.

Only a person who sees the Christian religion as analogue may not be able to see the consistency of really believing that God created and saw that it was good.

The testimony of T. S. Eliot confirms that Williams as a man was of a piece with his literary productions; but again, the realist Eliot, in his introduction to All Hallows' Eve, indicates that he believed that Williams partially failed as an artist because he did not or could not conform himself to accepted norms of composition. Eliot, who received his degree in philosophy at Harvard it may be recalled, does catch a glimmer of the necessity of form-manipulation.

...Williams invented his own forms (sic)--or to say that no form, if he had obeyed all its conventional laws, could have been less satisfactory for what he wanted to say.<sup>40</sup>

Eliot fumbles badly searching for a manner of classifying Williams's thought; he is forced to fall back continually on his understanding of the man's character:

For him there was no frontier between the material and the spiritual world. Had I ever had to spend a night in a haunted house, I should have felt secure with Williams in my company.<sup>41</sup>

Notice that Eliot sees that God's creation is all one for Williams, and that our persistence in separating nature from supernature is a nominal distinction to him, or perhaps a formal distinction; it is certainly not real. Even to a theologically minded man like Eliot, such perception is to be considered "peculiar":

<sup>40</sup>T. S. Eliot, "Introduction", in Charles Williams, All Hallows' Eve (Boston: Noonday Press, 1971), p. xiii.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

To him the supernatural was perfectly natural, and the natural was also supernatural. And this peculiarity gave him that profound insight into Good and Evil, into the heights of Heaven and the depths of Hell, which provided both the immediate thrill, and the permanent message of his novels.<sup>42</sup>

Probably the most instantly recognizable aspect of conceptualist metaphysics is the idea that there is no break between nature and super-nature; they overlap and interpenetrate at every level of being and experience. Even more vital to him is his insistence on the centrality of moral theology, or better, moral action. This emphasis in Williams leaves Eliot somewhat perplexed. He has just praised Williams for his "profound insight" into the nature of morality, and then just as abruptly praises him for not projecting this insight into the novels.

The conflict which is the theme of every one of Williams's novels is not merely the conflict between good and bad-men, in the usual sense. No one was less confined to conventional morality, in judging good and bad behavior, than Williams: his morality is that of the Gospels. He sees the struggle between Good and Evil as carried on, more or less blindly, by men and women who are often only the instruments of higher or lower powers, but who also have the freedom to choose to which powers they will submit themselves.<sup>43</sup>

If Eliot is only saying in a verbose manner that Williams is not judgmental toward people or the characters of his creation, then there is no argument; but Williams is never afraid to judge a character when we are permitted to share the omniscient author's peek into the intentions of his character. Wentworth's and Tulmulty's damnations come readily to mind, not to mention the otherwise incomprehensible conversion of Gregory Persimmons.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. xiv.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. xvi.

<sup>44</sup>Williams, War in Heaven, pp. 265-280.

What Eliot probably means is that Williams is playing for much higher stakes than the individual fates of his individual characters; he is also showing the cosmic dimensions of Good and Evil that exist anterior to the machinations of the particular actors. The simple refusal to perform an act of kindness can reverberate throughout eternity, as Evelyn learns in All Hallow's Eve.<sup>45</sup> A submission to "the co-inherence" may lead to acts of glory passing human understanding, as Lester learns in the same tale.<sup>46</sup> In this way only, Williams's morality is not conventional. The content of good human behavior is unaltered by such a vision; in other words, the doctrine of the Sermon on the Mount is binding on all Christians. Williams's profundity comes from making clear the supernatural implication in Christ's words. As Eliot states the case, Williams could be open to the interpretation of holding "higher doctrines." This is an important consideration to raise in an author concerned as much with occultism as is Williams. One matter that is a constant in the esoteric societies is that they teach a "higher" doctrine, which is usually a contradiction of Christian morality; a number of them are satanic.<sup>47</sup> Later it will be shown that Williams will portray the occult only to reject it ultimately as either evil or at least unhealthy; the antithesis between Williams and occultists will be apparent to anyone who reads Williams's rejection of the idea of matter as an evil, and his equally categorical rejection of

<sup>45</sup>Williams, All Hallows' Eve, pp. 172-201.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 240-273.

<sup>47</sup>Francis King, Ritual Magic in England: 1887 to the Present Day (London: Neville Spearman, 1970), passim.

gnosticism, i. e., neither his divinely inspired heroes, nor his demonically possessed villains have privileged information.

Eliot, though, may only mean that Williams never openly preaches, which is true, and the statement is probably more a comment on Eliot's taste, Williams's and the twentieth century's, than objections based on literary criteria. The sermons of Cardinal Newman would be banished as literature by such canons, and that the great Tractarian works are less read than formerly could easily be explained by the distaste for exhortation among our contemporaries.

Further, as Eliot recognizes, what was unusually keen in Williams's perceptions was his awareness of the loathesomeness of evil, which was tied firmly to his literary ability to make his audience share in his disgust and horror of that which offends God.

Williams's understanding of Evil was profound. Had he himself not always seen Evil, unerringly, as the contrast to Good--had he understood Evil, so far as it can be understood, without knowing the Good--there are passages which could only be outrageous and foul. He is concerned, not with the Evil of conventional morality and the ordinary manifestations by which we recognize it, but with the very essence of Evil; it is, therefore, Evil which has no power to attract us, for we see it as the repulsive thing it is, and as the despair of the damned from which we recoil.<sup>48</sup>

Here Eliot may have touched on the real reason for much of the puzzlement and distaste for Williams among the reading public. Without the shared background of Christian morality, his stories are ridiculous, and they are meaningless (and melodramatic) to anyone who disbelieves in the objectivity of evil. A reader feels with deep emotions the abyss and emptiness of

<sup>48</sup>Eliot, "Introduction", p. xvi.

that which separates itself from its Creator. Such writing requires a web of assumptions on the part of the reader.

Thomas Howard has noticed that besides the context, the images in the novels force a consideration of the occult elements in them.

Williams...found special images that would suggest in themselves the centers of human aspiration (...knowledge, ecstasy, power). This is what makes his novels seem occult. Williams was not interested in an escape from the actual. It is simply that, with his vicarious imagination, he saw these images as a frightful source of conflict.<sup>49</sup>

No doubt, but assuredly his close association, no matter how briefly, with men like A. E. Waite as a member (like Yeats before him) of The Order of the Golden Dawn must have affected his sensibilities.<sup>50</sup> Yeats continued to search for images from occult symbolism for the rest of his life.

Williams used them more probably because he was both attracted and repelled, much like his own character, Roger Ingram, who shall be discussed later.

It is Thomas Howard who has called the work of Williams's editorial career disparate, noting that he wrote about writers with "as little in common" as Dickens, Hopkins and Kierkegaard.(sic)<sup>51</sup> What they have in common is the ability to portray a conceptualist view of life. Somewhat like Eliot, Howard feels that he must justify discussing literary works in terms of their ideas, primarily because Williams leaves him little choice. It is absurd, however, for a literary man to feel the need for apologizing

<sup>49</sup>Howard, Charles Williams' Experiment, p. 7.

<sup>50</sup>King, Ritual Magic, pp. 9, 112.

<sup>51</sup>Howard, Charles Williams' Experiment, pp. 11-12.

for talking about the manifest content of a piece of writing. What forces Howard to make the novel leap of discussing what a work is about happens because

Williams's work...is peculiar. It does not proceed by focussing on a central figure; it is not mundane; it fails perhaps in magnitude; it lacks the structural subtlety that we look for in our novels; and it draws upon subject matter and treats it in a way that is alien to the modern novel.<sup>52</sup>

In other words, he sees that Williams has shattered the novel form, and has remade it to suit his own purposes, and that to make the statement that was in him, he was forced to do so by his content. As we have seen, this new direction of form is inherent in conceptualist aesthetics.

After Mariann Russell makes the tell-tale error of calling Williams eclectic, she notes that he will use anything handy as part of his arsenal:

In developing his central ideas, Williams selected from religious and philosophical systems, from history and from literary works of all ages. Thus, Williams can be said to lack an acute historical sense because he is not seeking to place an idea in the context of its age so much as to relate the particular idea to what he considers a basic pattern of reality.<sup>53</sup>

At best, this statement is a half-truth. Because Williams acts from with-  
in a framework of thought, accepting across time those people he recognizes as kindred thinkers, Russell chides him for not being a systematic his-  
torian, which is also untrue as a short acquaintance with Descent of the  
Dove, Queen Elizabeth or James I will quickly prove. Her inability to

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>53</sup>Russell, Idea of the City of God, p. 12.



see unity in Williams's thought, impairs the usefulness of her otherwise painstaking work. Christopher Fullman's interesting study echoes the foresaid critics because he believes that "Williams will not easily fit into a school."<sup>54</sup> Russell's study especially would have improved tremendously from a knowledge of conceptualism, because a number of her isolated observations have the ring of authenticity about them. For example:

Williams's images of the city are for the most part attempts to present the unusual significance glimpsed in a personal religious experience.<sup>55</sup>

... Williams tends to seek archetypal meanings in personal experience and to relate such meaning to a system he derived from Christian dogma.<sup>56</sup> (From an eclectic yet!)

To Williams, the supernatural appears as the prototype of the natural so that in the original creation, there existed in nature nothing that had not pre-existed in the supernatural. Creation is a kind of image of the Creator as the supernatural is the meaning of the natural.<sup>57</sup>

Relationship is for Williams a natural image of a supernatural fact. The principle of the individual spiritual life is the perpetuation of Christ's historic substitution; substitution is the 'inscape' (sic) of the city.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup>Christopher Edward Fullman, "The Mind and Art of Charles Williams: A Study of His Poetry, Plays, the Novels," Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1955, p. 415.

<sup>55</sup>Russell, *Idea of the City of God*, p. 43.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

Even more than the bishop of Hippo, who had a professional concern with voluntary evil, Williams emphasizes that voluntary evil lies in relation rather than substance.<sup>58</sup> (The reference here is probably to The Forgiveness of Sins, p. 132.)<sup>59</sup>

These are little gems that float through Russell's book like leaves in water: beautiful but without continuity. Her refusal to come to grips with the unity of Williams's meaning leaves her work a collection of useful aphorisms. The present study was begun in the hope of rectifying such misunderstandings of the man's accomplishments.

One recent study puts forth some reasons for Williams's lack of popularity, and at the same time teaches (probably without conscious understanding) the reasons why he wrote as he did:

A main reason why his work, for all its intrinsic excellence and extrinsic historical usefulness, remains so little known is its unusual difficulty. At first sight his style at times is crabbed, mannered and wholly impenetrable. Many passages require repeated close readings even for the necessary preliminary sympathy between reader and writer, let alone for a thorough understanding.<sup>60</sup>

To a scholar like Shideler, whose own writing suggests conceptualist presuppositions, or to the present writer, there are no such problems reading him.<sup>61</sup> Generally, however, (for many readers) the problem exists. Davidson proceeds to light on an obvious choice for making a comparison with Williams.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>60</sup>Alice Elizabeth Davidson, "The Fictional Techniques of Charles Williams", Dissertation, Indiana University, 1977, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup>Mary McDermott Shideler, The Theology of Romantic Love: A Study in the Writings of Charles Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), p. 3.

Like Gerard Manley Hopkins, who also struck even the most penetrating of his earliest readers as crabbed and affected, Williams needs time to build, to train his audience. Then he can be seen, like Hopkins, to give his complex materials powerful direct expression.<sup>62</sup>

Peckham and C. S. Lewis before him have observed that the only real traces of genuine obscurity in Williams as a fault are the careless ways he sometimes uses antecedents.<sup>63</sup> The new form of in-Godded romance-novel may create one problem, however. Because of the Stevensonian or even Chestertonian material Williams uses as a springboard for his own constructions, an uninformed reader will doubtless expect a story that moves rapidly from incident to incident like The Man Who Was Thursday or "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." Indeed, the plots of a Williams novel make one want to move with an adventuresome gallop through the stories. Such a reader will almost immediately become impaled on the reflective passages, and be forced to back-track because embedded phrases which seemed trivial are quickly shown to have a cosmic significance. Such attempts to read Williams for light entertainment will most likely lead to frustration rather than to fruition. The novels are best read orally with the nuances savored by all the senses. It should be remembered that one of the tenets of conceptualist art was that it plunges the audience into a world of sensuous detail. (See pp. 17-18.) Like a play that only takes

<sup>62</sup>Davidson, *Fictional Technique*, p. 1.

<sup>63</sup>Robert Peckham, "The Novels of Charles Williams," Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1965; C. S. Lewis, "A Commentary on the Arthurian Poems of Charles Williams", in Arthurian Torso (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 187-188.

on life in performance, those passages that so disturb Davidson make good prose sense on the first reading (allowing for the acknowledged antecedent problem) when articulated.

Although it is offered tentatively, another problem may exist for the reader of a conceptualist work. That Williams shifts from sensation, to perception, and thence to intuition as modes of knowing, could possibly confound readers of other philosophical persuasions. The ground of truth forever seems to be shifting on them. Thus, a naturalist will be enjoying a passage of rapture, when suddenly Williams will show what the rapture means. The mystic will share a character's contact with super-nature, only to be shown either the pattern in the truth or its physical effects. A reader must be prepared to proceed where Williams wishes to take him by not resisting his logic, or else he can easily become befuddled.

His attitude toward artistic creation tells a potential reader how to interpret his ideas:

I once very daringly asked him whether the line in one of the Taliesin poems, 'the feet of creation walk backward through the waters' was meant as a description of the effects of sin and the Fall. With characteristic humility he replied after a moment's thought, 'I have never thought of that before, but that is certainly one of the things it means'. Paradoxical and frivolous as this answer might seem to some, there could hardly be a clearer or more spontaneous avowal that the poet's function is not to give expression to the dredged-up precipitates of his own sub-conscious but to witness to his imperfect but nevertheless authentic perception of the manifold aspects of objective reality.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Lewis, Arthurian Torso, p. 13.

This approach does not imply that what the poet expressly intended is of little or no meaning. Rather that meaning has ramifications and implications far beyond what the artist consciously put in the work. Those interpretations arising from the work itself and which are in harmony with the conscious intentions of the author add to the original without distorting its meaning. This attitude at first glance, seems related to ideas expressed in Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism,<sup>65</sup> but a closer look at that monumental work shows that Frye constantly breaks down categories whereas Williams multiplies them. Frye may well be eclectic in the sense of having devised (to use his own terms) an encyclopedic approach, which seems to be a pragmatic manner of scholarship because true system is rejected a priori. Williams, on the contrary, delights in tidying-up and sorting-out in what seems a sheer delight in using his brain. This is a typical sentence from Williams's own criticism: "Eros need not for ever be on his knees to Agape; he has a right to his delights; they are part of the Way."<sup>66</sup> Literal fact is less important for him than creating paradigms for the channels of knowing (i.e., body, intellect, and will). For instance, in Religion and Love in Dante, Williams tells us in a footnote that whether or not Beatrice cut Dante dead in the streets of Florence is historically unimportant, because, "a literary convention is, at its best, a means of passion."<sup>67</sup> Such passion is a means of conveying truth

<sup>65</sup>Northrop Frye, The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press), passim.

<sup>66</sup>Williams, Religion and Love in Dante (London: Dacre Press, 1941), p. 40.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

and goodness; therefore, any method of exciting passion to the ends of the transcendentals constitutes a valid literary approach (he would call it a "Way").

Patterns are the dare, as they are the necessity, of criticism as of life; they can be connected only by destruction, and no doubt this pattern will soon enough be destroyed. But their creation and destruction is our only method.<sup>68</sup>

So says Williams, the system-builder in criticism; his own critics have not recognized the pattern that pervades his own work. Since so many statements in this chapter have been brought up only to show their shortcomings, I should like to end these comments on the critics with a disclaimer. A tradition of conceptualism as here defined is not universally recognized in theology or philosophy, much less in literature. Because of this, no critic to date (except Shideler--and she only implicitly) recognizes the internal consistency, nay, the system in Williams's thought. The principal reason for these pages is to confront any future attempt to call Charles Williams by that pejorative term eclectic.

<sup>68</sup>Williams, Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), p. v.

## CHAPTER V

### SHADOWS OF ECSTASY AS A CONCEPTUALIST NOVEL

Throughout his entire oeuvre, Charles Williams retains the conceptualist position with remarkable consistency, rightly having ignored the injunctions of his close friends to simplify his style (which we have argued would have destroyed his meaning). Though six of his seven novels have a small though devoted readership, one stands apart for provoking dispute even by Williams's following; that book is Shadows of Ecstasy.<sup>1</sup> In the shorter of her two studies, Shideler sets it apart from the others, implying it to be singular in its obscurity.<sup>2</sup> In his popular study of the Oxford Christians, Humphrey Carpenter likens the book itself to the confusion of mind of one of its characters, who says that it is

all such a mad mixture, purple rhetoric and precise realism, doctrines of transmutation and babble about African witch-doctors and airships and submarines.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, he calls it "one of the oddest books ever to go under the

<sup>1</sup>Charles Williams, Shadows of Ecstasy (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933). Subsequent pages will be to the more readily accessible edition. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965).

<sup>2</sup>Mary McDermott Shideler, Charles Williams: A Critical Essay (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 46.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Williams, Shadows, as quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, The Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams and Their Friends (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1979), p. 93.

name of a novel..."<sup>4</sup> and claims that "Its lack of interest in ordinary character portrayal was striking."<sup>5</sup> Clearly Carpenter considers the work a total failure.

Easily the most consistent and coherent reading of the novels is that of Robert Peckham; even if one occasionally cavils at individual judgments, all Peckham usually lacks is an understanding of the threads holding Williams's thought together. But when discussing Shadows of Ecstasy, even Peckham follows suit:

The book is indeed inferior to the other novels; it deals with difficult and odd situations clumsily; the characters tend to operate on their symbolic level; the theme is strange and is both philosophically difficult to sympathize with and psychologically unimaginable.<sup>6</sup>

What a reader can "easily sympathize with" is largely a matter of taste and not a criterion for literary discussion; but to maintain that no one can envision the underlying psychological validity of the novel is clearly a wrong-headed statement as will soon be demonstrated. Peckham not only has no sympathy with the book, he totally misunderstands one of the central characters, one of whom an understanding is vital for a proper reading:

For the priest, however, the ecstasy has been intellectualized nearly out of existence. 'He defined men by morality; it was perhaps inevitable that he should define God in the same way'.<sup>7</sup>  
(Kant has also been accused of defining God by morality.)<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Robert Peckham, "The Novels of Charles Williams," Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1965, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-14.

<sup>8</sup>William Turner, History of Philosophy (Boston: Ginn, 1929), p. 391.



First, Peckham calls this an example of the via negativa, which it is not. Morals are imperative no matter which Way one pursues God; the elevation of morals to define man is not primarily an intellectual approach, as we have seen. Caithness carries the position Williams wishes to present; if the novel fails at all, it is because central truths are not placed more centrally before the reader's imagination.

Peckham's perception of the principal character, Nigel Considine, is a bit closer to the mark; he sees him as a D. H. Lawrence figure, and he is probably partially correct in calling "...the book...sort of a commentary on the ideas of D. H. Lawrence."<sup>9</sup> Here Peckham elucidates the character of Considine and talks about him as a man held up to our admiration. No wonder Peckham and others who take this approach have difficulty understanding the novel.

The book is a twentieth-century English recasting of an Anti-Christ myth; the Anti-Christ character (Considine) denies his infernal nature at the only time the subject is broached in the text. But the Anti-Christ would lie. Upright men like Roger Ingram and Inkamasi, the Zulu king, follow him. But Christ warns, does he not, that the Anti-Christ would fool, if it were possible, the very Elect? Here is the question a reader must ask himself if he wishes to know whether or not Williams succeeds in this work; has he demanded too much from his reader by presenting him with Anti-Christ and allowing that reader to risk misinterpretation?

<sup>9</sup>Peckham, Novels, p. 23.

As Thomas Howard was aware in his study of the novels:

Since Williams's seven novels represent seven different imaginative approaches to one single idea, an exhaustive rendering of each one would end up being intolerably boring.<sup>10</sup>

But to give such a reading to but one of the books would be profitable and reveal how conceptualism can inform the working of a piece of fiction; and since even Williams's admirers seem baffled by Shadows of Ecstasy, if coherent conceptualism can be shown in that work, it should be readily transferable to the remainder of his imaginative literature.

Unfortunately, what makes this novel in some ways easier to study is that Williams asserts the meaning explicitly. Too often in contemporary times this is perceived as a defect. A novelist is expected to show, not to tell, and the reader is then expected to interpret and analyze the raw data of the book for himself. This method is perfectly acceptable--if the writer or the reader is a pragmatist or a materialist. Once again the right aesthetics is needed to fit the right author. The following analysis is offered to help clear up the confusion generated by Carpenter and some of his fellow critics:

These novels were all concerned with the rightful and wrongful use of power. And here somebody reading them may find himself in some confusion, for Williams's ideas of right and wrong often seem extremely odd. In Shadows of Ecstasy, it is disturbing to find the 'hero' Roger Ingram becoming a disciple of the 'villain' Considine.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Thomas Howard, "Charles Williams's Experiment in the Novel," Dissertation, New York University, 1970, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup>Carpenter, Inklings, p. 96.

But do not the exalted of the earth follow Soloviev's Anti-Christ?<sup>12</sup>

Turning to the text of the novel itself, the story begins in medias res during the peroration of an address by Roger Ingram, a professor of poetry, which he is presenting after a dinner for the explorer Nigel Considine and the assembled geographical faculty of the University of London. Ingram's chair was that of "applied literature", i.e., its endower wished for literature to be applied to life as the sciences are.<sup>13</sup> The author, in omniscient voice, comments on Ingram's book, which attacks those who believe in "the purification of literature from everything else".<sup>14</sup> Already the reader realizes that action is superior to knowledge, or better, that knowledge exists for action. After some light banter (banter is the most noticeable characteristic of Williams's dialogue) the author says that Ingram, "would, in short, have been a bore, had he not been himself".<sup>15</sup> That truth to his own intentions supports his integrity and allows him to be integrated as a man, i.e., not a bore.

In rapid order, the author introduces Isabel (Roger's wife) and Sir Bernard Travers (a retired, distinguished surgeon), who discuss Considine before the reader meets him. To an outside observer, Considine is simply an eminent explorer and something of a mystic; his public life has

<sup>12</sup> cf. Vladimir Soloviev, War and Christianity (London: Constable, 1915), passim.

<sup>13</sup> Williams, Shadows, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

revealed nothing about what he intends. Throughout the discussion, and throughout the book, Sir Bernard speaks with a detached sense of ironic humor, as a sort of Oscar Wilde with retired scalpels; and he always upholds the intellect; at the moment, though, he is perplexed because he cannot remember where he saw Considine before.<sup>16</sup>

Williams is capable of dropping a piece of light, casual (but serious) moralizing (though oblique) into any part of his plot. As the evening closes, here is how Williams announces the playing of "God Save the King": "The National Anthem implored Deity on behalf of royalty, and dismissed many incredulous of both."<sup>17</sup> Such gratuitous moralizing permeates Williams's works, and-- as has been argued --is a conceptualist trait.

Then Considine is introduced; Roger had quoted Rimbaud's ominous lines, "I will encounter darkness as a bride/ and hug it in mine arms." Considine challenges him instantly by asking whether he means the lines as truth, or "...do you use apposite quotation merely as a social convenience?"<sup>18</sup> With exact detail, we are told that Considine's eyes "smoulder."<sup>19</sup> Already it is possible to classify some of the characters as they align themselves along the chart of philosophical possibility. Roger erects poetry and the exquisite passions as the standard by which he makes his decisions for life; he is an idealist. Sir Bernard wishes to retire from action to contemplate and comment on life; he is a realist. Considine

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

burns passionately to put beliefs into action; he is a mystic. That such categorization is not a commentary on worth will be seen; the categories do consistently describe the limits of what each character comprehends of what is happening at any given time. For instance, the aloofness of the idealist makes Roger have a "sardonic consciousness that the subservient listeners probably thought...a little mad."<sup>20</sup> He relishes such superiority, but Considine in conversation is like "a hand of energy at rest."<sup>21</sup> The passivity of conversation appears foreign to his nature, as it generally will to a mystic. Sir Bernard constantly reflects, as in passages like: "The intellect hardly ever failed one eventually, if one fulfilled the condition it imposed."<sup>22</sup> Aristotle or St. Thomas Aquinas would have been pleased by such a statement; his intellect has allowed him to understand that poetry is Ingram's religion.

In the first ten pages then, Williams plunges the reader into a milieu of poetry professors, after-dinner speeches, African explorers with sinister implications, a retired surgeon who flashes wit, and his businessman son Philip. The detail of the action and character is already extremely dense, just as an understanding of conceptualism has already predicted. But on the next page, Williams introduces to the reader and the members of the party, the character on whom the action will eventually turn: Ian Caithness, an Anglo-Catholic priest and friend of the Archbishop

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

of York. He is described as looking ascetic, but we are informed that he practiced no austerities.<sup>23</sup> Intensity of devotion rooted in the active life is a conceptualist hallmark.

At the moment, a massacre of Christian missionaries in the interior of Africa has disconcerted Caithness.<sup>24</sup> The Church has asked for no reprisals by the secular arm because the missionaries had anticipated the possibility of martyrdom. Sir Bernard suddenly remembers an old photograph and recalls that as a boy he took a picture of his grandfather in company with a man who resembles Considine remarkably, and they discuss the impossibility of Considine's being over a hundred years old. This is the only element in the plot that can be construed as "fantastic" (read impossible to the incredulous) that appears in the book. To date, no critic has noticed that the great age of Considine is not unlike that of the Grand Llama in Lost Horizon, or like Ayeena in Haggard's She. What Williams is doing then, is employing a sub-genre of popular fiction and attempting to elevate it to the status of an enduring work of art. There is a difference, however; whereas Rider Haggard or James Hilton sacrifices character for the sake of plot, Williams tries to keep both in balance: One cannot imagine Shadows of Ecstasy without the precise contributions of the highly individualized characters. On the other hand, any explorer could be substituted for Alan Quatermain, or any adventurer may have been thrust into the action of Lost Horizon without loss to the work as a whole.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

This bending of the form--this synthesis of, let us say, Robert Louis Stevenson and John Galsworthy--gives us a conceptualist form allowing an author to show the goodness of supernatural truth through natural action mediated by intellectual understanding; and even if he neglects detail of background, the events continually transpire with great rapidity.

In the second chapter, it is revealed that Philip works for a syndicate developing parts of North Africa; conceptualist immersion in specific detail is never more in the forefront than when young Travers tries to read his morning newspaper only to discover that his employer, Simon Rosenberg, has committed suicide, and that African hordes have taken over much of the area where his companies' holdings lie. "Philip goggled at the thick type, and instinctively tried to read both accounts at once."<sup>25</sup> All communication with the African interior has ceased; Rosenberg was despondent over his wife's death, and the jewels he bought for her adornment lay at his home meaninglessly. In conversation, Rosenberg's love of natural beauty is held up as a pale reflection of Caithness's love of Church and God.<sup>26</sup> On the philosophical level, this means that a denial of physical goodness with its supernatural equivalency leads to despair and suicide. Philip, (the representative of the typical modern man) is left in confusion. Rosenberg had developed a mania for making "for his wife" the most wonderful collection of jewels in the world; Sir Bernard's immediate reaction is to desire to discover what happened (to possess knowledge) as a result of the Rosenberg tragedy.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-27.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

The next few pages consist of plot exposition: Considine is at the inquest into Rosenberg's death, he reveals that he was the deceased's last visitor (we are never told but we later assume Considine manipulated the death), and he says he was concerned about the dead man's state of mind. When the will is read, it is discovered that his fortune is left to two cousins, Ezechiel and Nehemiah, two fanatics who hate Gentiles, and that Considine and the Grand Rabbi have been named executors.<sup>28</sup> This much action takes a scant two-and-a half pages. From this point on, the abundance of detail need not be mentioned again so as not to be distracting.

When Sir Bernard and Considine engage in small talk shortly after the inquest, the first hint appears that the explorer has some gnostic motive: Sir Bernard says off-handedly that man has stomach and mind (rational animal), but Considine counters with these words:

O so far! Considine answered, and normally! But it's the farther and the abnormal to which we must look. When men are in love, when they are in the midst of creating, when they are in a religious flame, what do they need then either with the stomach or the mind?<sup>29</sup>

The implication is that men can overcome the limits of the body by sheer force of will. Gnosticism usually takes either an idealist or a mystic form. Considine's desire to enter a purity of action rather than of mind identifies him as a mystic.

When Considine confronts Ingram, however, he applies arguments that appeal to the professor's mental constructs, especially in regard to

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-30.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 31.



his understanding of the nature of poetry. Considine constantly confronts Ingram with a "pattern of imagery," to use a phrase much beloved by idealist critics. Death is a form of poetry and the criticism of verse is a form of embalming--and vice versa; Ingram claims that people like "embalmed" (i.e., analyzed) poetry "better than the live thing."<sup>30</sup> Ingram, then, realizes the limitations of the subjective use of poetry and wishes to impose his categories in action, thereby recalling the perpendicularity of idealist thought. (See Appendix II.)

Since Williams was a conceptualist, his characters, from his viewpoint, will sometimes have insights beyond the limitation of their perspectives. Philip, the modern pragmatist, experiences an occasion of Beatrician love in Bonaventuran terms (Williams mistakenly attributes the words to Augustine): "she herself had no circumference."<sup>31</sup> This means that he is constantly feeding on the truth of her being. Once again we have a restatement of the Franciscan doctrine of divine incarnation as a reflection of God, coupled with the Scotist haecceitas. But this is merely a toddler's first step for Philip: "He was still a child of the new birth; maturity of intellect as of morals was far distant."<sup>32</sup> The young pragmatist has become a naturalist; he has yet to learn the validity of intellect and will.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

Sir Bernard's reaction to his son's new-formed naturalism is predictable; he is the type of realist who has not yet concerned himself with final causes; therefore, "Dante was to him no more ridiculous than Voltaire; disillusion was as much an illusion as illusion itself. A thing that seemed had at least the truth of its seeming."<sup>33</sup> He permits only what his intellect puts before him for his consideration, but he allows everything that comes before him thus as possessing equal validity. Even if his son is only infatuated, then the girl is capable of making his son infatuated.

The eyes of Rosamund might or might not hold the secret origin of day and night, but if they apparently did then they apparently did, and it would be silly to deny it and equally silly not to relish it.<sup>34</sup>

This means more than simply not poisoning the wells of philosophy; it means that truth and goodness and beauty can reside in apparent falsity, and that whatever verities come by whatever means, they are of the Good. This too follows from a conceptualist position.

The African leaders have issued a proclamation which first reaches the reader filtered through Ingram's idealist understanding: "It says that the Socratic method is done for."<sup>35</sup> He appears to have made the statement with a twinkle in the eye. The declaration itself turns out to be an announcement that the ways of Africa will soon overcome the ways of

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

Europe whether by force or by co-operation. The statement is a tissue of purple prose expounding pure naturalism with calculated appeals to others. In this context, the Africans play on Ingram's prejudices:

to all who owe their devotion to music, to poetry, to painting and sculpture, to the servants of every more than rational energy; greater than those and more numerous, to all who at this present moment exist in the exchanged or unexchanged adoration of love, it the powers calls more especially.<sup>36</sup>

After serious reflection on the impending African invasion, Ingram can only comprehend what is happening in terms of Milton; thus is the ability of idealism to act projected off on a tangent, one with "the truth of its seemings" perhaps, but a tangent nevertheless. The chapter on the proclamation ends on the sinister note of Ingram unwittingly introducing more than he can yet know, or more than he is subsequently to learn from his experience--he posits the possibility of the African leader as Anti-Christ. He suddenly quotes the familiar lines from Yeats' "The Second Coming."

What rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born.<sup>37</sup>

He muses on what the "prodigies of the birth" will be; Considine will soon make clear exactly what those prodigies are.

The next chapter opens with another gratuitous moral discussion; young Philip, the pragmatist-cum-naturalist, ponders the morality of following slavishly the desires of the beloved. That he knows nothing of romantic theology is beside the point; he is a man with the experience of

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

adoration, and wants to know what he should do. Morality is the natural state of men, Williams is telling us, no matter what a man may think he thinks. This placing of an average young man into the identical situation which confronted Dante before Beatrice is another example of the extraordinary risk Williams takes with his creations. Philip muses over Rosamund while he rides in the Tube.<sup>38</sup> To thrust the reader into a timeless condition contained in an otherwise mundane setting, either increases or decreases the verisimilitude of the action, depending upon the individual backgrounds and apperceptions of each reader; Williams is here attempting a solution in fictional technique to the age-old problem of appearance and reality.

Caithness, the Christian priest, is not concerned whether or not the gospels of the Africans are true or not; the invidious quality of their doctrine of blood far exceeds the importance of such comparative niceties as to whether or not they are correct. For Caithness, "One can't trust one's own vision too far; that's where religion comes in."<sup>39</sup> Such statements lead Peckham to consider Caithness as a type "of those who wish to use force to destroy the evils of the world,"<sup>40</sup> which makes him an equivalent to Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor (even though Caithness overtly condemns such inquisitorial practices). The problem with this point of view is that the Grand Inquisitor seeks to preserve and protect Truth; Caithness wishes to promote the Good. This is a difference in kind because

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>40</sup> Peckham, Novels, p. 14.

immoral means cannot be used to uphold Good (by definition) without self-contradiction. The tendency to see Caithness as representing a position to be embraced--though it flies in the face of most modern readers' prejudices against people who strictly adhere to dogmatic belief--is yet another example of Williams's moral preaching to his audience.

Almost on the heels of Caithness's announcement of his fears, financial panic and an atmosphere of general lunacy begin to assert themselves throughout England.<sup>41</sup> In a second proclamation, the Africans announce that they plan to reinstitute the old forms of blood sacrifice and darkness:

Victim or priest at that altar, it matters not whether you inflict or endure the pang. Come, for the cycles are accomplished and the knowledge that was of old returns.<sup>42</sup>

The effect on the people of London is almost instantaneous; they begin hunting blacks wherever they can find them. Subtly Williams has introduced a pet theme of his, namely that a perpetration of evil locks the victim into a situation that has only morally intolerable consequences. For example, take the case of an innocent people who are attacked; they must either fight back, thereby committing terrible acts of violence in their own right, or else they must not resist, allowing a greater evil to hold sway. This sullyng of the victim's moral predicament is to Williams one of the worst features of the nature of evil. It is only natural that when faced with an alien doctrine manifestly evil directly threatening their lives, a London crowd could easily become a lynch mob. "Evil begets evil"

<sup>41</sup>Williams, Shadows, p. 51.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

may be a trite phrase, but Williams often clothes this bromide with believable situations.

During the rioting the Ingrams grant temporary asylum to a black who had been threatened by the mob;<sup>43</sup> he is soon to identify himself as Inkamasi, a king of the Zulu tribe.<sup>44</sup> In typical fashion, Williams stops the action to analyze his assembled characters by means of their conversation: talk about boiling milk and talk about differences in temperament between the sexes. Various other chatter reveals the attitudes of Isabel, Sir Bernard and Philip.<sup>45</sup> Philip is still taken by Rosamund's Beatrician perfection, or rather what he perceives as such: "the movement of her arm was something frightfully important..."<sup>46</sup> The reader soon learns what resides in the heart of this woman with the important arm: she is spiteful and sneaky.<sup>47</sup> Notice that in no way does such a revelation vitiate Philip's vision: what seems real seems real, and his vision of Rosamund as she could be in her beatitude will not be taken from him. Actually, Rosamund persistently shows petulant annoyance at Philip's romantic vision of her--the implication being that she despises the disparity between his vision and her actuality.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

All the characters in the company, and especially Roger Ingram, are quite taken by the young king who loves to discourse on poetry; reluctantly Sir Bernard and Ingram begin to accompany the Zulu to his lodgings, and in what Humphrey Carpenter might consider one of the book's wild coincidences,<sup>48</sup> Considine suddenly appears before them emerging from a cab. Later we discover that under certain unspecified conditions, Considine (in one of his many resemblances to Christ) is able to read minds, at least imperfectly. This explains why he may know where to find two people together for whom he has concern. Coincidence in Williams operates similarly to the way it works in a Dickensian novel. There reader wavers between an admiration for character and action; Dickens and Williams do not shrink from tailoring one to suit the other, because people affect events, and conversely, events affect people.

Immediately thereafter Considine places the king in a hypnotic trance, using more words identifying himself with Christ: "I will make you free". Considine is saying here that he is the Truth (the Truth will make you free), and of course Christ said that he was the Way, the Truth and the Life.<sup>49</sup> Another Biblical text often comes to mind when Considine/Christ imagery comes forth in this novel: "By their fruits you shall know them".<sup>50</sup> Throughout the book, in a way diametrically opposed to the formalists who would say, as Peckham does, that Considine indeed is a type

<sup>48</sup>Carpenter, Inklings, p. 94.

<sup>49</sup>John 8:32; 14:16.

<sup>50</sup>Matthew 7:20.

of Christ,<sup>51</sup> the actions and intentions of the characters have meaning only as they are filtered through an understanding of extra-literary pre-mise, in this case orthodox Christian doctrine. Considine claims he will make Inkamasi free; what that means remains to be seen. The Zulu leaves with Considine, as the others agree to join them for dinner the following evening.<sup>52</sup>

At that dinner the reader learns that the Rosenberg brothers wish to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem with the proceeds from their inherited jewels. The Rosenbergs seem to represent the truth of other religions (in my Father's house are many mansions), and their tenacious adherence to the ways of their fathers is held up to the reader as an indication of moral worth; that they are also dupes of financiers and Considine is quite beside the point. Considine himself (as deceiver) often mouths true sentiments, as he does when he says of the brothers' desire, "It is a great act of creation; they prepare for Messias."<sup>53</sup> That, according to the author's belief, Messias came two millenia ago is also beside the point; if Williams is a conceptualist, this passage is not ironic. A man enters or engages into time and space at his choosing, since time and space are modes of perception, and a man can literally prepare for something that has happened or infer something that will be. This accords with orthodox Christian doctrine; without some realization of the temporal condition as

<sup>51</sup>Peckham, Novels, pp. 7-26.

<sup>52</sup>Williams, Shadows, p. 67.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 69.



a mode of perception, neither atonement (redeeming the past) nor prophecy (anticipating the future) would be possible. The Rosenbergs then are minor characters who counterpoint the theme by representing salvation in a foreign mode.

During the dinner conversation, Considine declares that he believes that the African proclamations are authentic, and indicates the first clue to his real identity when he maintains that "It is gospel, perhaps a crusade, which is approaching."<sup>54</sup> As Considine continues his pronouncements by declaring that the conquest of death (resurrection) is like the intimations heard in the flow of great poetry, Inkamasi remains listless. Throughout the discourse it is obvious that he is still entranced.<sup>55</sup> Ingram begins inclining toward Considine's position, since he believes that the magnificence hinted at and echoed in the best verse must reflect a greater reality, and Considine seems to offer that reality.<sup>56</sup> When later the characters learn that death, destruction and nihilism accompany Considine's gospel, they might possibly have looked back on the next words Considine utters; it is a statement of mystical identification, but an inverted one. A religious mystic wishes to flow into the object of his vision, to become one with God by submission to God's will. To desire to take the nature of things and draw them into the self is an admirable definition of a perverted mysticism, a diabolism:

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

You can know your joy and direct it...When your manhood's aflame with love you will burn down with it the barriers that separate us from immortality. You waste yourselves, all of you, looking outwards; you give yourselves to the world. But the business of man is to assume the world into himself. He shall draw strength from everything that he may govern everything. But can you do this by doubting and dividing and contemplating? by intellect and official science? It is a greater labour than you need.<sup>57</sup> (Italics mine)

Such attempted assumptions of the world to the self were the way of the Fallen Angels; the rejection of intellect and official science was the way of the medieval witches in their covens and the Renaissance alchemists who attempted to conquer nature by transmutation of base metals into gold. Indeed transmutation is a word dear to Considine as we shall see. Any attempt to continue identifying Considine as a Christ figure rather than as an Anti-Christ figure, therefore, is absurd. In Williams's own terms, Considine co-heres, but he does not co-inhere.<sup>58</sup>

Further, Considine claims that those two great ancient figures of secular and religious power, Julius Caesar and Jesus Christ, were types that anticipated the gospel to come. Considine's speech reflects the almost universal tendency of the several occult gossellers whether ancient or modern to include Christ as one of the prophets, or as a figure who somehow possessed part of the truth that a new faith proclaims; often they also identify truth with some ancient secular achievement, whether it be the temple of Solomon, the pyramids of the Pharoahs, or the grand empire

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Shideler, The Theology of Romantic Love: A Study in the Writings of Charles Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), p. 184.

bequeathed by Caesar.<sup>59</sup> For Considine, Caesar was murdered before he could accomplish his goals of empire, and Christ was a failure:

Ah, if Christ had known love, what a rich and bounteous Church he could have founded! He almost conquered death in his own way, but he was slain like Caesar before he quite achieved it. So Christianity has looked for the resurrection in another world, not here.<sup>60</sup>

The meaning of Considine's character turns on what he means by the word love. He only understands that any kingdom that fulfills the desires of men's hearts must be in this world "by the transmutation of your energies, evoked by poetry or love or any manner of ecstasy, into the power of a greater ecstasy."<sup>61</sup> Like Uncle Andrew's speech in C. S. Lewis's The Magician's Nephew, this grand-sounding speech when translated into simple prose means that people of power can do what they like to whomever they like for whatever reasons please them.<sup>62</sup> Far from being lost in a never-never land, Williams is depicting a character with strong political power who is attempting to harness occult forces so that he may unleash them upon the world. The Nazi Party was well under way toward making such a plan actual as Williams was writing this book.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>59</sup>H. Spencer Lewis, F.R.C., Rosicrucian Questions and Answers: The Complete History of the Rosicrucian, 13th ed. (San Jose: Supreme Grand Lodge of A.M.O.R.C., 1977), pp. 188, 292.

<sup>60</sup>Williams, Shadows, p. 73.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>C. S. Lewis, The Magician's Nephew (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 18.

<sup>63</sup>Louis Pauwell, Morning of the Magicians (New York: Stein and Day, 1964). This volume documents the Nazi affiliation with numerous occult groups, many of which sound as if they had aims remarkably similar to that of Considine.

Shadows of Ecstasy, it should be recalled, is a romance as well as a novel. At this stage of the action, Considine reveals that he has already partially succeeded; he is over two hundred years old. He has reached this great age retaining youth and vigor while increasing dramatically in power by refusing to participate in the ordinary intercourse of society--refusing to participate in the co-inherence that is, living on "by the power not of food and drink but of the imagination..."<sup>64</sup> A passage such as this can easily fool a reader; it fools Ingram. A number of the audience is usually left startled at Considine; if he is evil, why does he understand so much about the important mysteries? Notice that his understanding is almost always slightly askew from a Christian perspective. Williams permits his reader to succumb to Considine's seduction if he is not wary; it is a risk the author took with the success of his artifact, and this conceptualist device (no compromise) has probably done more to limit an appreciation of the novel than any limitations of invention on the author's part.

What intensifies the possibility of misreading the book is that by the end of the dinner, Ingram is totally mesmerized by the new message of power he has received.

His intellect had shown him the marvelous glories of the line of poetry, but as he passed into it and between its glories his intellect revealed itself but as one of the elements. A moral duty swept him on. This energy was to be possessed, to possess him, and then--then he would have time to find yet greater powers even than that.<sup>65</sup>

That Ingram now mingles "moral duty" with his previously merely aesthetic

<sup>64</sup>Williams, Shadows, p. 75.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

responses to life indicates change, and as we shall see, it is change for the better. Yet only by listening to the occultism of Considine, and later by coming under his direct influence, is the moral improvement possible for him. The artistic dilemma of the plot is once again solved if we apply what is by now becoming a refrain of these pages: a man is judged by his intentions. By being allowed to enter Ingram's mind, the reader sees that the professor of Applied Literature genuinely wishes to apply the power of poetry to his life. He realizes that he needs a more fundamental grounding than aesthetics can give him, but his intellect and moral vision speak to his growing maturity as a man as well. That he is only able to realize the good by becoming the disciple of an evil man is irrelevant; Ingram is never to realize clearly that Considine is evil. Considine propounds themes of music to his guests as a means of enticing them; only the impeccable realist, Sir Bernard, keeps his head entirely, preferring to take his music "like a gentleman".<sup>66</sup> The spiritual cannibalism of Considine and his followers is made explicit when he tells the story of a composer:

He had overcome all things except music, but that lured him to spend his power and he died. We feed on what he did that we may do more than he.<sup>67</sup>

To the logical response that everything would die were he serious, Considine replies with imprecision and mystagogy that what awaits is a "passion of ecstasy".<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

If the Rosenbergs have chosen how they enter time and space, so has Considine: "Time and space hung behind him, his background and his possession, themselves no more separate but woven in a single vision..."<sup>69</sup> In other words, he has chosen to stand aloof from time and space themselves so that he may try to dominate them. This might even be a Kantian definition of evil. Not only does Williams attribute images redolent of Christ to Considine, but he often speaks of him in sacerdotal imagery, thus making him a type of the priest. Since his function is already identified as evil and even diabolical, Considine would then represent some kind of priest of the black arts. When he greets two associates, he "stretches out his hand, the other bows over it, genuflecting a little at the same time..."<sup>70</sup> He speaks as if he were participating in a ritual,<sup>71</sup> and promulgates authoritatively as if he held episcopal dignity: "The permission is in yourself...I only heard it, but that is right that I should do. Are you a child of the Mysteries"?"<sup>72</sup>

Much later we learn that the man to whom he is speaking has offered himself as a human sacrifice so that he may attempt to conquer death in the most literal meaning of that phrase, i.e., physical resurrection. What Considine says at this time, however, is only that earthly desire if it is transmuted into imagination preserves life. The words of the other man

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

will later become horribly remembered by the reader, "I will go down and come again living",<sup>73</sup> words which when spoken sound merely as if they were part of a rite. Considine, we discover, has been having a ritual supper with associates by night in secret before a ritual death; that death is not his own but Nielsen's, the associate. Unlike Christ the Anti-Christ does not take the burden on himself. The parody of the Last Supper is obvious. The sound of gunfire interrupts them. Considine asks, "Can it be the African planes?...Has the intellect failed to guard its capital?"<sup>74</sup> Some of the assembled seem to realize that Considine and the High Executive of the African gospel are the same person.<sup>75</sup> In response to Ingram's enquiry, Considine echoes Hamlet when he told Horatio that there are more things in heaven and earth that are dreamt of in his philosophy: "...there is more in verse than talk about smiles and metaphors, and you know it. Hark, hark there is triumph speaking to man."<sup>76</sup> Power and passion lie behind the dignity of verse and Considine is quickly making Ingram aware of the consequences of such a belief.

Chapter Six, "The Mass at Lambeth," contains both the most potent and the most realized power shown in the book; it is striking that those critics who have discussed this volume seldom refer to the Mass, because the actions of Ian Caithness are the only actions that the protagonists

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

(so to call them) ever use to counter Considine (except for using the traitor who will be mentioned in turn). Without the Church and her representative, the movement toward evil would stand completed. Caithness was not at the dinner, but Travers reports what had happened. He is shocked, but as a Christian and a priest, his first concern is for the soul of the all-but-forgotten Zulu (who it appears is also a convert). Through all the purple prose, Caithness breathes some good sense; speaking of Considine, he recognizes immediately that the power is infernal and that he holds some kind of power over Inkamasi.

Many modern readers prone to be receptive to the flippancy of Sir Bernard may think somewhat less of Caithness because in the middle of the priest's deliberations on the soul of a man, the skeptical peer muses that he "wouldn't remember that God had ever been known to disagree with Ian."<sup>77</sup> A close look will show that the reflection is more on the character of Sir Bernard when Ian announces that he plans to see Inkamasi; and he takes Sir Bernard along with him. This courage, knowing Considine's great power, goes far beyond Sir Bernard's off-handed epigram which is likely to remain in the modernist's mind. Again Williams takes a risk of being misperceived in order to increase verisimilitude. As to the gospel of Considine, the priest simply says "That's all been done."<sup>78</sup> He is stating what all Christians would say, and he is attempting to do the will of Christ. What more can a Christian author make a character do for the sake of goodness?

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 91.



They discover Inkamasi sitting alone in the dark, and rapidly the priest understands that the king's will is dominated. For a conceptualist, as for a mystic, the capital sin would be to rob another man of his will, for it is by the will that man is most truly himself; thus Considine, by having the Zulu under his power, has to that extent deprived him of his manhood. Williams makes clear that in the center of man is the rock-hard freedom of the will that no man can damage; another person can only tamper with its ability to affect the world. When Caithness asks whether he sleeps by his own will, Inkamasi replies: "I watch by the will of him that rules me...Inkamasi is hidden within me. It's I yet not I that sleep."<sup>79</sup> Caithness attempts an exorcism: the name of God is what Considine has hidden,<sup>80</sup> as he has also hidden the name of the Mother of God. In turn, the Trinity, the faith, and the body of Christ are invoked, all to no effect. The failure of the exorcism does not show defeat, but rather how strong an adversary Considine is for the Church. Caithness and Sir Bernard take the Zulu back to London.<sup>81</sup>

Caithness's plan is to take Inkamasi on the following day to Lambeth, where his evil can be offered to God at the Eucharistic Prayer. All the poor, muddled waffler Bernard can understand is that Ian's conversation seems to him much like Considine's, this knight of the realm having become a pattern of the invincibly ignorant, the converse of how he thinks of himself.<sup>82</sup> This is an example of conceptualist irony.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

Not so much the facts, though they were grotesque enough, but the manner of the facts, disturbed him--the triumph, the fanaticism, the shadows of ecstasy.<sup>83</sup>

For all his contemplative desire, Sir Bernard simply has gotten himself into something he is incapable (from his own philosophical position) of understanding. The "shadows of ecstasy" refers to the resurrected life the occultists wish to obtain; presumably real ecstasy would be synonymous with immortality.

Philip, meanwhile, as he drives the company to the cathedral, continues to muse on his Dantean vision; he is now realizing the eternal in his exalted perception of Rosamund, and is beginning to be able to reflect on his experience. His naturalism has become a type of the rationalist who looks for the ordered perfection arising from the welter of physical data. Philip is becoming mature:

The moment of vision in Isabel's kitchen, when Rosamund's arm had lain like a bar of fundamental power across the whole created universe, dividing and reconciling at once, had stirred in him something more than masculine...Even if it passed--though of course it couldn't pass--but even if it did pass, still its passing had yet nothing whatever to do with it.<sup>84</sup>

The perfection he had seen in its permanence remains no matter what ephemera interfere with the understanding of truth. Philip would now be at home in Plato's Republic.

The reader observes through Philip (the new believer in Truth's eyes) the Mass celebrated for the African's soul, mixing his comprehension with elements of his romantic vision. The act of the Mass the author

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

calls "the restoring of a will."<sup>85</sup> This act, for a conceptualist, would mean that sacramental imaging or incarnating of a truth reflects the spiritual. The actions of the Mass bring the will of Inkamasi back to himself; in a passage making a rare combination of mundane fact with expression-- "I drive this time"<sup>86</sup>--and liturgical exactness--"the Archbishop as swiftly went back to the altar, genuflected, and returned, bearing the Sacred Gifts"<sup>87</sup> natural images merge with supernatural so that nature appears quickened by spirit, and eternity is felt to contain nature as well. Williams thus upholds sacramental intercession.

Later Inkamasi is able to reflect on Considine's power over the African chieftains, saying that "many of them had become conjurers, debased things" and that "those who had sold their magic to Considine were very greatly afraid."<sup>88</sup> This statement clearly supports the notion that Considine had consciously worked with the occult arts so that he might attain power over others. It is probably worth reflecting at this point that some ten years after this book was originally written, and five years after it was published, Williams wrote an essay in which he discussed the nature of creating an Anti-Christ character for narrative art. We have seen enough of Williams's own creation and have participated in enough of his thoughts, so that only a few statements are necessary about a conceptualist evaluation of his artistic intentions. The Anti-Christ is to be

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., pp. 103-104.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., pp. 107-108.

a pure embodiment of evil. Why then does he not engage in obvious cruelties or perversions? In order for an author to devise a subtle plot for a tale, Williams says that "Anti-Christ must not be mad, to begin with. He must not, even, be too romantic."<sup>89</sup> He must be plausible enough so that ordinary and extraordinary people can follow him. He will stir people, but not really to the depths.

Anti-Christ is bound to be a kind of sterile romantic; there is hardly anything else for him to be--classic he cannot be and realist he will not be, and therefore, he must be the one kind of romantic who can become neither--the sterile or pseudo-romantic.<sup>90</sup>

This means that he must pass, like Considine, beyond caring for such evils as killing or the like; all conduct for him is pride, the pride that draws everything to itself, the despair of Dante's Satan. "Anti-Christ cannot be funny. But neither can he have a serious purpose except to himself."<sup>91</sup> It will be noted that Considine cares little for the revolution he has begun, nor for its consequences. His sole real interest is in himself. Yet Considine is constantly presented in Christ-like imagery, as we already observed; that is because "nothing but Anti-Christ can be Christlike, in the consciousness of a kind of otherness from men."<sup>92</sup> Thus the imagery one can attribute to him reverses the usual pattern of Christ imagery; to some extent a figure of Judas or perhaps Caiphas would be found in the working out of the plot associated with Anti-Christ. Inkamasi's knowledge

<sup>89</sup>Williams, The Image of the City and Other Essays, ed. Anne Ridler (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 119.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

has removed whatever lingering doubts the reader may have had about Considine when he declares about him:

He desired a greater mastery, and that I think he found. Most men waste their energies, even at their best they waste them, on fantastic dreams and worthless actions. He has sought to restore its strength... he has learnt to arouse and restrain and direct... to such purposes as he chooses.

These characteristics are those Williams has ascribed to the Anti-Christ.

Destruction is also part of the co-inherence, but Considine rejects it as he does all life. He had bound the king's will as a child, as he had the wills of all the African kings.<sup>94</sup> What he desires more than anything else is a continent where his gospel may flourish, where he will be able to draw followers to himself so that he can feed from their wills. Here Dante's Satan is the model again; notice the reality of evil and its banality. To divorce one's self from goodness and truth is to wed idiocy. As Inkamasi observes: "mankind cannot be saved without intellect and without God."<sup>95</sup>

That Ingram announces himself squarely on Considine's side<sup>96</sup> after so much knowledge clearly demonstrates that the young don's obsession with poetry has overmastered his rational faculties. An old maxim derides those who do the right things for the wrong reasons; Williams through his character Ingram is telling the reader that it is meritorious to do even

<sup>93</sup>Williams, Shadows of Ecstasy, p. 108.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

the wrong things for the right reasons. Again one must turn to the doctrine of intentionality. Ingram wishes to know the pure power that is the substance of poetry, i.e., he wants to learn to know God. With that invincible ignorance already observed, Sir Bernard questions the universality of Ingram's emotions toward poetry and Considine;<sup>97</sup> to any conceptualist, a genuine limitation of the Aristotelian is his inability to deal with the private comprehension of particular men, precisely because he is lost when not participating in universality. Though Ingram's reply is made to his wife, for a moment the character echoes the sentiments of his creator's attitude toward any approach to scholarship or to life that only speaks objectively:

And in these centuries you've nearly killed poetry, with your appreciations and your fastidious judgments, and your lives of this man and your studies in that. What do you know about 'huge and mighty forms that do not live like living men'? Power, power, it's dying in you, and you don't hunger to feel it live.<sup>98</sup>

Roger's religion is poetry; this outburst then is equivalent to an orthodox Christian's revulsion at scholars who intimate that their discovery questioning the historical accuracy of some bit of Biblical datum somehow undermines the tenets of the faith. Only Considine of all the people in his experiences has echoed what is in Ingram's own heart; that is why he will follow the adept.

Philip has completed his transformation in the meanwhile; it will be recalled that he has progressively moved from pragmatism to naturalism,

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

to rationalism. He now decides for Rosamund and belief because he feels the necessity of faith for completing his life. He is acceding to a Kantian categorical imperative; he fully takes responsibility for the intentions of his will.<sup>99</sup>

Within a page, Williams introduces a character antithetical in position to what Philip has become, identical to what he was when the novel began. The Prime Minister, Raymond Suydler, governs the nation by making shrewd guesses; Williams hints that he drifts with whatever situation he discovers, and finds what best works. By definition, this is pragmatism. Aside from furthering the plot, to juxtapose the shallowness of Suydler with Philip's decision for the moral good only shows up the conceptualist view of the emptiness of the pragmatic way.

To Sir Bernard, the realist, Suydler is equally absurd; he had visited his office to report Considine as the High Executive of the African invasion, but his thoughts were other:

And what was the good of trying to defend the intellect in this place of the death of the intellect? Witch-doctors were invading Europe, and he had gone running to an ape for help...<sup>100</sup>

Thus two invincibly ignorant characters confront each other; both are decent gentlemen in their way, and Williams treats them with the respect they deserve. Suydler never understanding the real point, and Sir Bernard never being able to live in the mundane world. Yet, Williams shows us that they do communicate, because no matter under what delusions they act,

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

they are each fully human. Although, as usual, he is incapable of coming down to earth, Sir Bernard correctly observes:

If A is the same as B, and B is the same as C, then A is the same as C. Other things may be true; for all I know, they may be different at the same time; but this at least is true. And Considine will have to hypnotize me myself before I deny it. Suydler is wrong--a guess may be true once and twice and a thousand times, for man has known abstraction, and no gorilla of a politician can take it away from him.<sup>101</sup>

Each man if he chooses (for the conceptualist) sees truth to the extent he wills.

The will affects not only individual souls, but society as well. Materialists generally apply fiction socially more than others, because they are confronted with phenomena and then interpret meaning, bypassing the understanding. Conceptualists must first filter the meaning of phenomena through human intellect and psyche before any social meaning can result. As a result, it is only after understanding the motives of men like Considine, the Rosenbergs, and Suydler--men who manipulate public events--that the reader can be prepared to understand the social implication of their actions. Only at this point does Williams indicate the social effect Considine is having on England as a whole. Financial panic is threatened, the people are afraid, and money is pouring into the hands of financiers, to the acquisitive advantage of the Rosenbergs among others.<sup>102</sup> Williams clearly indicates the potential suffering Considine is weighing over England's head; this is one way that does not have the solidarity of the people, because they do not understand what they are fighting against.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., pp. 122-123.



Another aspect of Williams's technique is becoming apparent; just as the reader is able to grasp the significance of one movement of the action, he jumps to another by a novelistic equivalent of what in cinema is called parallel cutting; thus he moves back and forth among the thoughts and actions of the participants with a temporal simultaneity. It may be possible that this technique relates directly to conceptualism because only complete awareness of what underlies an action will allow an audience to know all the complexities of a character's intention. Dickens and Dostoevsky use such criss-crossing of action, albeit in longer "takes" than Williams, no doubt because of the slower pace demanded from the writing of their epoch. The straightforward, linear techniques of Trollope and Tolstoy, or the modern D. H. Lawrence, are less involved than the pyrotechnics of, say, Dickens. These thoughts are offered tentatively, however.

Williams does "cut" to Philip's meditations on the social implications of Considine's actions; Philip's insights into the nature of Love are now intensified because he realizes fully the disparity between his vision of the beloved and the real Rosamund, who spurns him.<sup>103</sup>

Once again, Williams abruptly cuts, this time to Ingram, who by this time would smash windows (and probably the universe if he could) to get at the source of truth in poetry.<sup>104</sup> He does become the model of the man who tries to attain his intuition of ineffable truth and cannot because such truth is unattainable; he wants he knows not what, but he desires it with all his heart:

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

I want--yes, I--the thing that's me wants to know, not like wanting apple-tart with or without custard, but like wanting breath. There's air outside the windows, and I shall smash them to get it or I shall die.<sup>105</sup>

In other words, he wants God; the church has not spoken to his condition, and so he searches for his desire where he can, in this case in Considine. Even more, his desire is to touch the source of Considine's power, that which is like his life's approach to reality in masters like Beethoven and Michaelangelo.<sup>106</sup>

With Dickensian co-incidence, the maid announces the arrival of Considine and his confederate Mottreaux. (In a throw-away line, Williams calls the young servant Muriel "Unnameable"; such anonymity and subordination of social classes conceptualists almost invariably find intolerable. By so labeling her, Williams clearly intends to cast reflection on the Ingrams, who are consumed with their own affairs, but who are quite able to keep someone in an inferior position to themselves.)<sup>107</sup> The Ingrams' self-concern makes clear why, with encouragement from his wife, Roger agrees to accompany Considine to Africa.<sup>108</sup> Roger is to become a disciple in the most literal sense, like the fishermen who followed Christ.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

Considine tells him that he rejects anything that absorbs his energy.<sup>110</sup> Ingram, too, must learn to withdraw and take power from others. Once again Considine echoes Jesus: "I have meat to eat that ye know not of," and in his own voice he declares, "I am in obedience to all laws I have not yet mastered."<sup>111</sup> This means that someone may yet be able to kill him by treachery, and he cannot take time to guard against such an occasion too zealously because that also is an absorption of energy. One feels that anything that would be vanity to the author of Ecclesiastes would absorb Considine's energy. Roger chooses to go with them.

The reverse gospel imagery reaches one of its crescendos at this time. Rosamund (Judas) has betrayed Considine (Christ) to the government (Sarnhedrin). They come for him by night. In this case, Anti-Christ suppresses his enemies by first creating an oppressive atmosphere and then by using his will to brush aside the officers who attempt to take him. "Who takes me?" he asks spreading his arms in mockery of the crucifixion and flees.<sup>112</sup>

Until this episode, the reader has never really entered Rosamund's mind, except fleetingly to know that she finds some people repulsive. The reader has not had enough information to judge Rosamund's betrayal of Considine except by inference from her usual petty and spiteful nature. That information Williams now places before the reader. She has sought

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., pp. 132-133.

ineffable desire in her own way, and it has thwarted her approach. She seeks revenge for her life of pain: "her outraged flesh rebelled and clamoured from starvation for food."<sup>113</sup> She hates everything that would lead her to happiness, especially from someone like Philip, who loves her. Her life is a pattern of revenge, and she suffers acutely from the sin of envy. That is why she also wishes to destroy Considine, not so much because of his evil as because of her jealousy. But the next day the realization of magnitude--not of her action but of her intentions--strikes her: "like all men and women who are not masters of life, she swayed to and fro in her intention and even in her desire."<sup>114</sup> In one part of her being, she has a secret longing for Inkamasi. That is why she has acted the racist toward him.<sup>115</sup> Though alive, "she hated life..."<sup>116</sup> Since she has withdrawn from life, she has not chosen to enter time and space, the conceptualist equivalent to Platonic non-being: "...the strait-jacket of time and place imprisoned her as it imprisons in the end all who suffer from a like madness."<sup>117</sup>

In the meanwhile, Philip has gotten on a bus to try to think through the muddle he has made of his affairs, but as he passes Liverpool Street Station, he hears shouts, the bus stops, and he suddenly discovers

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

himself pushed along by a mob who are intending to threaten the Rosenberg brothers.<sup>118</sup> Williams obliquely pleads that the Jews have become scape-goats because of their reaction to international and financial speculation; the complaint of the rioters is that these "dirty Jews" have stolen the people's money. No one could be more bewildered by the turn of events than the poor Rosenbergs; that their cousin may have had some culpability is probable; the mob holds them responsible. It is the innocent Nehemiah Rosenberg who is lynched. Philip is able to usher away the surviving brother with the aid of police.<sup>119</sup> The intensity of this scene becomes even more poignant when it is realized that Williams wrote before Hitler's ascendancy; he predicted a potentiality he saw. As the crowd disperses, in the distance is heard the sound of guns.<sup>120</sup> The disastrous intertwining of war and finance is complete.

Over 800 airships have attacked England, totally destroying five villages; the voice of Considine comes over the radio warning that a third attack on the country will be a thousand times stronger and will destroy London. Part of what Williams seems to be saying co-incides with the by now proverbial observation of T. S. Eliot about "dissociation of sensibility." Considine had cloven art from logic, and when he enters Sir Bernard's home shortly after his radio speech, he revels in the potential

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., pp. 137-138.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., pp. 139-141.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

destruction of intellect<sup>121</sup> and that he will teach London what feeling really means.<sup>122</sup> The restored Inkamasi tries to attack Considine, but Montreaux shoots him in the thigh.<sup>123</sup> For extremely various motives, Considine leads to his secret retreat not only Montreaux, but Inkamasi, Caithness, the surviving Rosenberg, and of course his new disciple Ingram. Even with the attempt at completeness tried in this reading of the novel, a complete detailing of the motives of each character would require a discussion of an interminable length. Suffice it to say that the specific detail has become almost too dense to recite each element of the action without equaling or exceeding the number of words in the text itself.

Williams portrays a London in full disarray. Refugees march, red glares flash through the sky, and the night is full of "hysterical shrieks", while looters fight over goods.<sup>124</sup> As the party moves along, African troops greet Considine shouting "Glory to the Deathless One." The nature of this army shows why the English people are living in such terror; the soldiers often leap and scream. Considine's car kills some of them under its wheels, but yet they continue to dance in frenzy. When some of the English fire on them, the Africans increase the intensity of their entranced

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., pp. 145-146.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., pp. 149-150.

activity.<sup>125</sup> They even begin to stab each other.<sup>126</sup> Considine says to his party that he is showing to England "things wild and possibly triumphant," and that the Africans will have the death they have asked for because they only wish to die for the Deathless One. For this reason they are engaging in a mass suicide. (This seemingly most incredible of the incidents in the novel unfortunately was also vindicated by time as being plausible in 1978 when the followers of Rev. Jim Jones committed mass suicide in Guyana.) It should be becoming clearer that Williams's fantasy always at least tangentially relates to religious and social possibilities, and the wild improbabilities of a fifty year old Williams novel may become tomorrow's headlines. Considine has no pity for the Africans because they are not adepts.<sup>127</sup> He compares the slaughter to the martyrdoms of the Christian saints; and denounces non-magical worship:

...man...desired immortality, and deceived himself with begetting children and with religion and with art. All these are not ecstasy, but the shadow of ecstasy.<sup>128</sup>

Considine calls himself a true adept: one who wishes only to learn the esoteric secrets. The result of such "wisdon" the reader has just seen. What he desires is sheer power sucked from whatever source he can find, whether it be sexual or vampire-like from the desires of others. He had been forced to act swiftly because the adepts believed that "the religion of Europe" left to its own defense would overpower them. In the market

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., pp. 150-151.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

place of ideas and the wills of people who have heard the Gospels, Anti-Christ would have no power unless he also used (or manipulated others to use) physical force to effect his ends. All the brother adepts, "the united lodges" as they are called,<sup>129</sup> reminiscent of the organizational structure of secret societies that actually exist--all of them are united in this effort to overcome the Christian cultural domination of Europe. Williams is referring apparently to the widespread use of non-European influences that permeate such esoteric organizations whether the supposed source of this wisdom be Moslem, African, or "Eastern."<sup>130</sup>

Ingram's disregard for others is so great that all that he can desire is for the full ecstasy of power in poetry to master him and for him to master it.

His very physical body was being carried in towards the energy which created art. Art...the ancient word so often defiled and made stupid stood for a greatness only partially explored.<sup>131</sup>

He had no hesitation to think thus a mere few moments after the bones of human beings have been crushed under the vehicle in which he rides; such juxtaposition shows Ingram's moral impenetrability and selfishness. It is an evil of omission. Williams leaves the understanding of this serious character defect to the reader's own comprehension without any comment on right or wrong. Right and wrong are for the author matters of intention, and if a man's own obtuseness prevents him from detecting his own evil, he is thereby protected. Further, it would be typical of a conceptualist to

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>130</sup>Arthur Edward Waite, The Occult Sciences (Secaucus: University Books, 1974), pp. 1, 8.

<sup>131</sup>Williams, Shadows of Ecstasy, p. 156.



plant a complex evil in a character and to let the reader make what he will of him. Many intellectuals have thought the intellectual Ivan, who is the final cause of murder and destruction in The Brothers Karmazov, the protagonist of the book. Such ambiguities run rampant in the stories of Dickens, dating as far back as the complex creation of Jingles in The Pickwick Papers. Ingram is such an ambiguous character.

As Ingram dreams, London panics. The presence of the destructive and even self-destructive Africans has caused the city to lose control.<sup>132</sup> The City, it will be recalled, is for Williams the City of Man reflecting the City of God; he is showing what happens when alien forces strike a separation between the two. After the raid, the London-of-Man, so to speak, has temporarily cut itself off from London-in-God. This imagery is consistent with the Logres imagery from Williams's poetry.<sup>133</sup> In Shadows of Ecstasy, he paints a Walpurgis Night in Cheapside and Ludgate Hill. On the High Altar of St. Paul's, a woman cracks a bottle over a man's head.<sup>134</sup> In philosophical terms, Williams is saying that without the engagement of mind, beauty (which the adepts and Ingram desire) cannot be manifested; any attempt creates only tyranny or anarchy. Only Love, like the Love in the Man that restored Inkamasi, can lead to the beginning of goodness (will).

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>133</sup>Williams, Taliessin through Logres (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), passim.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

Sir Bernard can only understand that Considine has torn away "stability".<sup>135</sup> Roger's wife, Isabel, who has remained in the background for most of the novel and will hardly be seen again, emerges suddenly as an image herself. When pressed into action, she had sent Roger on his way because it would move them both toward goodness. In the following passage, Williams presents two of his characters at the limits of his artistic complexity:

Sir Bernard wished he could have heard Considine and Isabel arguing--not that Isabel would or could have argued. So far as he could see, she was saying exactly the opposite of Considine, and yet they were curiously agreed. They were both beyond the places of logic and compromise, even amused compromise. They were both utterly, utterly--well, they were both utterly, and that was that.<sup>136</sup>

Even Sir Bernard can sense the mysticism in Isabel's, if not sacrifice, then ability to attempt what she and her husband sought by sending him way. "He who would find himself, will lose himself; he who will lose himself will find himself," in the words of Christ. He is also able to see that what she has accomplished is the mirror opposite of what Considine has done. He has drawn power into himself; she has sent out power to do good. In this vignette, Williams has presented a type of the conceptualist mystic heroine, a little epicenter of good transcending itself.

As Sir Bernard questions whether or not Considine will keep his word not to attack London (his realism prevents him from discerning that such obvious deceptions have no place in Considine's character--they would absorb his power), Isabel's only immediate concern is for the welfare of

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

the wandering refugees and for trying to make sure the children have enough milk.<sup>137</sup> She has lost herself, and thereby has found herself. And by so doing she realizes what has always been potentially part of her:

I'm no good at words...and I'm a fool at knowing things, but when there's something in you that has its way, and when Roger's doing what he must do, and I too--O every fibre of me's aching for him and I could sing for joy all through me. Isn't that all the ecstasy that I could bear? Come and let's do something before it breaks my heart to be alive.<sup>138</sup>

This type of mystical woman will later take stage--center as Clohoe Burnett in Many Dimensions.

When Considine's party arrives at his house by the sea, Caithness demands to stay with Inkamasi and is taken to him. As Ingram obeys Considine's eyes (evidently the residing place of much of his power), the adept states that the Mass at Lambeth has made Inkamasi liable to pain.<sup>139</sup> Here is one of those instances where the adepts realize that even on the level of the magic they pursue, Christianity is its equal at the very least; Considine seems unaware of the contradiction of his statement, as do all the others. Lest it be thought that it is an accidental artistic flaw in this one work of Williams, he was to repeat the idea of occultists recognizing the equality of orthodoxy much more explicitly in his next novel, War in Heaven.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>140</sup>Williams, War in Heaven (London: Victor Gollancz, 1930).

The adept has arranged the rooms with a perfection of art; as Ingram makes ready for sleep he allows a phantasmagoria of images to overwhelm him.<sup>141</sup> He dreams of the youthful Wordsworth running after him carrying a shell which he waves aloft as he shouts, "A god, yea, many gods." From the shell emerges a voice singing the word power.<sup>142</sup> Conceptualists do not necessarily deny the validity of dream interpretation. Materialists like Freud can make vital use of this method in their system, because dreams shut out the intellect, and are a blend of physical sensation and meaning totally determined by a person's life. For the voluntarist, however, dreams can examine the residue of body and will; i.e., sum up a person's condition. The shell Wordsworth waves represents art and poetry, and the power Ingram desires seems to emanate from its source; Wordsworth and Considine (as mental icons) have become fused in his imagination.

One of the adepts is impervious to the cold. They all call Considine by his first name, just as much contemporary calling of people by given names is part of the initiatory rite of entering a profession. Considine has absorbed so much power that he can literally feel the nation shifting to his will.<sup>143</sup> Gaithness has taken this all in; when he sees the magicians gloating over their power, he imagines no elusive ecstasy. He rightly connects these men with the massacres of the Christian missionaries and the ritual deaths of the Africans, atrocities performed solely

<sup>141</sup>Williams, Shadows of Ecstasy, pp. 167-168.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., pp. 170-171.

so that Considine and his party can increase in power, and he further realizes that they had spared London from convenience, scorn, and whim rather than from humanitarian concern.<sup>144</sup> Yet Considine still justifies his actions by claiming that poets like Shakespeare (in the songs of Ariel) had predicted the Second Evolution of Man, as the African uprising is popularly known.<sup>145</sup> Considine and Ingram (and it is a belief their creator evidently shared) believe power lies in certain lines of poetry regardless of meaning; thus the line "on the bat's back" re-occurs with incantatory frequency. The claim is that somewhere in the rhetoric resides the power.

Throughout the novel, Considine has only hinted at his full intention: that he wishes to absorb power and to overcome death. He begins to work on Ingram's soul by initiating him into the mystery of the adepts. In a room with beautiful yellow hangings, the two men find Nielson lying on a low divan. Seven days earlier, he had died in ritual sacrifice. The company is waiting for the possibility of his resurrection by magical means; they are experimenting with the possibility of genuinely being able to conquer death.

Was the old symbolism of the mysteries true in its reversal? was the supernatural itself a visionary exhalation of the natural, and could it hold nothing but what the natural held?<sup>146</sup>

There is nothing either to a black magician or to a Christian conceptualist prohibiting such thought. The principal difference between the two lies

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., pp. 175-176.

only in the moral integrity of the attempt. Considine and his cohort would kill to achieve their goal, and would try to circumvent natural processes instead of submitting to them. A Christian would pray that "Thy will be done." Therein lies the gulf between them. The attempted resurrection seems to be working. A quiver seems to pass over Nielson's face which has only a light pallor covering it after a week. As his eyelids flicker, everyone waits with enormous expectation. In that ghastly experience, Roger has learned that there is no personified Death, only dead people.<sup>147</sup> The hideous finality of death without the possibility of eternity faces him squarely; only in life is meaning. But Williams will not sentimentalize; Ingram must understand with his own being, with his own free will, the life God offers him. Nielson's hands move and jerk, and then he is truly dead; instantly, the adepts draw the experience to their wills.<sup>148</sup>

Later Considine haughtily proclaims his own superiority to Caithness. "You should have kept to your pupils, Mr. Caithness, to the morals you understand and the dogmas that you don't."<sup>149</sup> Though Caithness offers to stay, Considine and Inkamasi wish to speak alone. Because of the priest's interference, Considine says that the king must choose his future, that is, whether to follow Nielson to death or to stay with the Europeans. His regality, the only part of his physicality that means

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., pp. 177-178.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

anything to him, has been taken from him by the nature of the European-African conflict. He also recognizes that the conquering of death would retain for him some share of kingliness, and that Considine for all his evil is genuinely committed to a passion for king-like strength:

I have always, so far as I could, done according to the gospel which moves in me and my friends, the doctrine of transmutation of energy, of the conscious turning of joy and anguish alike into strength and will, and of that passionate strength and will into all the exploration of all the capacities of man.<sup>150</sup>

Considine has in no way destroyed Inkamasi. The occultist admits the Mass freed the chieftain (thereby acknowledging Christ again), and he offers ritual sacrifice to him.<sup>151</sup> Inkamasi is facing the dark night of the soul, the truth that comes through temptation to despair. Europe has forgotten the Crown (kingship). Considine offers him majesty in death and potential resurrection. What allures the king is that only Considine, of those in his experience, understands royalty.<sup>152</sup> He had studied the ways of Europe for the sake of Africa so that he could better govern; since he will not be able to rule, he decides for lordly death. His conflict between his physical reality and his mental anguish has permitted him to attain a Platonic rationalism in that he sees truth as a dialectical process between mind and body, because he has united within himself, not in such a twilight but in a more wonderful vision of opposites, the day of his own individual being and mysterious might of holy and awful office.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., pp. 182-184.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

The sight of Nielsen's flirtation with resurrection has effected a profound influence on Ingram. The following morning he reflects on what happened, and feels his intellect slipping from him.<sup>154</sup> Since this has been the young don's only previous mode of knowing, he is anguished indeed; his idealism is beginning to slip away from him as well as his full devotion to poetry. Like Philip earlier, Roger is starting to grow up. "That dead hand moving had abolished the whole edifice of his mind."<sup>155</sup> He is at least aware that physical sensation is real knowledge; such commonplaces as cups of tea or snow seem more important than even poetry, and the image of the wave (eternity) has erected a sea-change in his mind.<sup>156</sup> Williams is far too subtle an artist to allow instantaneous change; Roger is now a little bit better able to will his will. Even so, that trained imagination can still take flight:

Who could tell what wonders waited then, when emotion was full and strong and sufficient, no longer greedy and grasping, when the senses could take in colour and essence and respond to all the delicate vibrations which now their clumsy dullness missed, when deprivation itself should be an intense means of experiencing both the deprived self and the thing of which it is deprived, when--when space and time were no more hindrances, where (for all one could tell) the body itself, might multiply itself...<sup>157</sup>

Williams anticipates the possible personality shifts that can take place in Ingram. His new-found ability to engage in sensuous experience ("colour and essence") and the dim awareness that something lingers in him superior even to his poetic understanding ("when space and time were no

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid., p. 188.



hindrances") combine in him to create an ecstatic view of his own potentialities; he is now able to pray, even though he does not know to whom or to what he lifts his voice.<sup>158</sup>

Further, he can see the chance of a similarity between Ian Caithness's love for human souls and old Rosenberg's love for jewels; formerly, he would have simply embraced a mental projection as a truth. With his new-found experience, he is able to discern that because a hypothesis contains certain advantages does not necessarily make it true. "The fact that man wanted a thing very much never did make it true--or the body that lay within would now perhaps be walking in the house and even coming up to speak to him."<sup>159</sup>

Caithness is the only character to have a total grasp of the cosmic significance that each of the characters participates in; he even says that Considine is like the Anti-Christ, which Ingram rejects as preposterous.<sup>160</sup> Considine is in the process of returning the jewels to the surviving Rosenberg brother. Caithness thinks Considine may take the jewels. What restraint would prevent him? He kills.<sup>161</sup> The adepts let the power of color course through themselves, but Mottreaux is attracted to the jewels for their own sake, not for power.<sup>162</sup> Even though

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

greed is grievous sin, to fall back on such sin is a step in the right direction when one has moved to the depths of spiritual pride which a man like Mottreaux has experienced; need makes him capable of action, because he has intention in the world once more. He says that he will kill for the jewels and die, and even asks, "let me hold them while you kill me."<sup>163</sup> Such seeming insanity is actually a kind of recognition of having cut himself off from normal human feeling, feeling that can even yet save Mottreaux; he refuses to transmute his desire for the jewels for their own sake into a desire for a power they could give him; in this, at least, he therefore rejoins the human race.

Throughout history, Considine now informs his audience, many men have tried death and resurrection though they have failed.<sup>164</sup> A message arrives, and he places the jewels temporarily into the keeping of Mottreaux who in turn eyes them greedily.<sup>165</sup> The effect of the action on the characters issues from this point on in a mosaic of intentions that will soon be completed by Considine's death. Roger has at long last learnt true Socratic humility, that he knows that he does not know, and thinks of "his feeble little understanding."<sup>166</sup> Here is a real first step toward wisdom for any conceptualist's understanding. In the same terms, Caithness's own position is made explicit.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid.

The nature of his intellect and the necessities of his office had directed his attention always not towards things in themselves but towards things in immediate action. He defined men by morality...<sup>167</sup>

Williams describes his character in the terms of Kantian philosophy; Caithness does not know the thing in itself, but only in action, and men can best be known by morality. This is nearly a definition of conceptualist metaphysics and philosophy of man. Furthermore, he must fight within himself to avoid religious dualism (evil being equal to good), which is a temptation to a conceptualist. For him

...Omnipotence might permit what it did not and could not originate. Yet other origin (outside Omnipotence) there be none. It is true he always added that it was a mystery, but a safer line was to insist that good and evil were facts, whatever the explanation was.<sup>168</sup>

Though the rest of the passage speaks of his limitations as a man, these thoughts of Caithness would easily find a home in the writings of St. Bonaventure or Duns Scotus. As Ingram's intention has led him to humility though he follows Anti-Christ, Caithness--though essentially a proud man--wills and prays to will the good that God commands.

A word to Caithness from Mottreaux triggers the final action of the novel. Mottreaux gives the priest an indication that he will try to stop Considine and that he looks for help; Caithness agrees, but to what extent he is not aware. He only sees a breach in the unity of the enemy.<sup>169</sup> Mottreaux has deceived Ian into thinking they are on the same side spiritually, whereas the former adept only wishes to secure Rosenberg's jewels. In Roman Catholic adult instruction classes, it is a truism that at con-

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid.

<sup>169</sup>Ibid., p. 198.

fession one can easily fool a confessor, but that the deception is not on the priest, but rather compounds the sin. Peckham somehow thinks this situation reduces Caithness's viability as the novel's true protagonist, to the extent one person can bear that title in a Williams novel.<sup>170</sup> If anything, Ian's position is strengthened because Williams continually puts before his reader the priest's unflagging intention to perform God's will. That he also succumbs to a temptation to kill (a lesser evil) for a greater good (the defeat of Anti-Christ) only demonstrates another conceptualist point, that evil affects and even diminishes the effect of good. No act of moral good can be perfect if evil has tainted it. In this way only are Caithness's actions tarnished.<sup>171</sup>

That night, Roger for the first time perceives his room as naturally one with his learning, as one act in time and space. He is now a man of free will, and well on the way to true learning, despite Considine, the central deception of his life.<sup>172</sup> Considine's eyes still seem arch-angelic to Roger, who remains as unable as some of Williams's critics to tell a Christ figure from an Anti-Christ figure.<sup>173</sup> After Considine relates his personal story, Roger's mind temporarily becomes clouded with a barrage of confused sea-imagery.<sup>174</sup> Williams often includes the

<sup>170</sup>Peckham, The Novels of Charles Williams, pp. 17-18.

<sup>171</sup>Williams, Shadows of Ecstasy, p. 199.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

fantasies of characters in such confused states; if to a conceptualist, all experience is subjective, then the ramblings of a soul in confusion are as central an experience as any objective event in his life. Who can say whether Roger Ingram's actions or his frightened daydreams are more "really" his experiences than any other? Actually whatever experiences affect his relationship to his will and to God are the most truly his own, because they are the most intense. The reader soon discovers that Ingram has taken his experience into himself in much the same manner as Considine advocates; once again, the intentions of a character weigh far more vitally with the state of his soul than whether the content of an action is objectively good or evil.<sup>175</sup> Ingram is becoming able to transmute his experience into the joy of heightened experience, but unlike his master, he understands such transmutation as part of his bounden duty:

He knew delight and named it; unafraid, he summoned it, and it came. He rejoiced in an ecstasy that controlled itself in great tidal breaths...Ecstasy was no more a bewilderment.<sup>176</sup>

Yet even in the ecstasy of achievement, Williams, by the tone of this passage, shows Ingram's further experience of temptation to spiritual pride in its full allure: "...only those who had not known it were afraid of it, for it was man's natural life."<sup>177</sup>

He comes to himself discovering the spiritual presence of Considine. Mottreaux becomes livid with rage when the adept gives Rosenberg his jewels; the orthodox Jew believes the Lord will reward Considine,

<sup>175</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>176</sup>Ibid.

<sup>177</sup>Ibid.

who in turn announces that Inkamasi will be offered to death and possible resurrection.<sup>178</sup> Ingram is appalled at what is proposed to happen to the king; Roger's conversion from an idealistic position to one of moral duty is already bearing fruit. Caithness goes much further, threatening, "You dare not touch him."<sup>179</sup>

The priest openly states at this point that Considine is Anti-Christ; Considine's reply could easily mislead the unwary:

Neither Christ nor Anti-Christ...but I living a gospel of redemption, and the ends of the world hear it: whom do men say that I, a son of man, am?<sup>180</sup>

He denies his first statement by instantly ascribing the imagery and the very language of the Christ to himself; in other words, he must be lying, and of course, like the proverbial Prince of Liars, Anti-Christ simply follows suit. Considine continues to take on to himself gospel epithets, but he tips his hand when he says, "'what we do we do quickly.'"<sup>181</sup> This is not language ascribed to Christ's action in this case but to Judas's; Considine's offering of Inkamasi is nothing more than simply betrayal, or more honestly, murder, whether or not he accompanies the slaughter with ritual religious trappings such as genuflections and the presentation of the divan as an altar.<sup>182</sup> Only Caithness realizes the full significance

<sup>178</sup>Ibid., pp. 206-207.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid.

of what Considine is doing, and draws a crucifix from near his heart and prays.<sup>183</sup>

Inkamasi makes clear why he permits his own death: "...though I hold you [the adepts] for my own enemies and for misguided men, I think you are the only servants of the kingship that is more than the king."<sup>184</sup> In other words, hierarchy must obey the dictates of hierarchical structure, and Considine's is the only power he can see announcing human power; it is the king's limitation and his death.

That death is executed when the king drinks a chalice filled with poisoned wine; because the motions ascribed to the participants are charged with liturgical meaning, and the actions culminate in physical sacrifice, these men are performing a variant of the Black Mass. Roger's disgust permits him to experience the superiority of the will to the intellect.

Till now he had believed that sense of harmony to be all they-- Isabel or Paradise Lost--had to offer, but he had begun to learn that to pause there was to be too easily content. The harmony itself was but a prelude to some enrichment of his whole being, which in its turn must be experienced in every detail...<sup>185</sup>

Something far deeper lies beyond the constructs of his mind. Thereafter, in rapid succession, Inkamasi drinks, the enraged Mottreaux stabs Considine and drags Caithness from the room; Ian goes to the car while Mottreaux breaks into Rosenberg's room, seizes the jewels, and then lays hands on

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid.

<sup>185</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

Rosenberg himself, whose martyrdom is complete for he dies wholly for the God of Israel:

His face, as he lifted it, was full of a scorn deeper than time, the scorn of his God for the spoilers of the holy places. He saw the distorted face of a greedy Gentile above him, and before the bullet searched his brain he spat at it once.<sup>186</sup>

The purity of such intention finds reward in death for a Williams character.

Ingram misunderstands Caithness's intention totally, and compares the priest to Caiphas, a piece of symbolism which is apropos indeed. We previously noted that the figures in a story of the Anti-Christ become reversed; whoever is Caiphas to the Anti-Christ does the world and the spirit good service, which is precisely what Caithness has rendered, even though he is justly and understandably horrified when the true meaning of Mottreaux's plot becomes manifest. To all those critics who claim the book a jumble, one paragraph above all explicitly states the unifying theme that holds all the tangled aspects of this novel together:

'God help me! Caithness said. 'I didn't know.' He hadn't known; he hadn't, if it were blameworthy, been to blame; if he were responsible for Considine's death, it was a noble responsibility, and he would bear it. Out of evil, God brought forth good. He added, 'Then there's the less reason to say.'<sup>187</sup> (Italics mine.)

From all the actions of men nefarious and relatively good, the Good of God will be brought to light. This theme constitutes the underlying structure of this book, of the complete Williams corpus, and of conceptualist writing of any kind. And with the adepts fighting amongst themselves over the prostrate bodies of Considine and Inkamasi, it is Caithness

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 215.



who has the fortitude to return to the house for his coat and Ingram's before the two of them drive away.<sup>188</sup>

While attending various refugees, Sir Bernard greets the Ingrams the next day noon at his home.<sup>189</sup> Roger is able immediately to see the purity of the change in Isabel, whose mysticism had previously been hidden from him. "He realized at the moment the vast experience of love which she had undergone, and accepted it."<sup>190</sup> They are clearly set upon a way that will lead them together to the experiencing of the Good. Yet he is left wondering whether Considine can possibly resurrect himself, and what would happen if he could return.<sup>191</sup> Roger has clearly become a man trying to pursue goodness; but as scripture predicted, the Anti-Christ can possibly deceive the elect. The profundity of Considine's deception still lives on; also, there will be successors.

For the moment, the movement is checked because it depended (as such movements often do) on the leadership of one man. Left to its own devices, the African army is totally overwhelmed.

Considine's body, like Christ's, is missing. Mottreaux's stabbed body had been discovered along with the king's. Suydler and Sir Bernard have not changed in the slightest. But the converted Philip Travers, recognizing where the real determination came from, is setting to right

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>190</sup>Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid., pp. 223-224.

the tangle of events. At breakfast, Sir Bernard asks whether Suydler or Considine deserves the votes of the people: "Philip read it [the newspaper article] and for almost the first time in his life startled his father into real admiration by saying that he should vote for Ian Caithness."<sup>192</sup> Philip's vote of confidence for Caithness is the same one Williams expects to evoke in the reader; this perception can only work if that reader, like the book's conceptualist author, views goodness as the most important of the verities. Ian Caithness, far from being "intellectualized beyond all belief," becomes the vehicle for a novel which for all its complications of form contains an extremely simple point: the Good is good because God made it, and that statement is also a central doctrine of John Duns Scotus.

<sup>192</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCEPTUALISM IN THE REMAINING NOVELS

To exhibit the conceptualism of the remaining novels of Charles Williams, it is necessary only to point out how the system is regulative in each book. Charles Moorman has observed that "Almost any sentence in Emerson or St. Paul, almost any line in Coleridge, contains the germ of all of Emerson or St. Paul or Coleridge or Charles Williams.<sup>1</sup> Thus, if one were to seize on a single essential element of plot, character, or argument in such writers, one would possess the key to the whole. Consequently, if a critic treats one of the many controlling points of an artifact and thereby shows that conceptualism is operative, then conceptualism can be assumed to inform the full work.

Take, for instance, the handling of the three protagonists in War in Heaven. Robert W. Peckham has shown that the symbolical functioning of these characters partakes of Arthurian parallels: the Archdeacon of Fardles takes the role of Galahad, the Duke of the North Ridings represents Percival, and Kenneth Mornington images Bors. Further, these characters also stand for the respective functions of the Church, the State and

<sup>1</sup>Charles Moorman, The Precincts of Felicity: The Augustinian City of the Oxford Christians (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1966), p. 30.

the laity.<sup>2</sup> In addition, they may be seen as representative of "superior wisdom," the protector of tradition, and "the excusable anger of the faithful."<sup>3</sup> The equivalency of this symbolism to the will-intellect-body conceptualism and to the manifold meanings of Dantean interpretation is readily apparent. The last of Peckham's trichotomies (which appears to be anagogical) requires additional commentary.

The Archdeacon, The Duke, and Mornington (according to this reading) represent alternative ways men of good will can war for what is right (the transcendental Good). Mornington is consistently impulsive in his actions, desirous only of destroying the enemy. Contrary to the overwhelming majority of twentieth-century moralists, Williams views his character's attitude as proper; the chapter in which he is killed defending the Graal is entitled "To-night thou shalt be with Me in Paradise."<sup>4</sup> The Catholic Duke desires that the Truth be preserved at all costs; his conduct is always explained in terms of his intellectual sustenance on Roman doctrine. In contadistinction, the Archdeacon's practical reason "and contemplative habits lead him to open himself up toward becoming God's instrument..."<sup>5</sup> In light of the earlier discussion of conceptualist aesthetics,

<sup>2</sup>Robert W. Peckham, "The Novels of Charles Williams," Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1965, pp. 27-52.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Williams, War in Heaven (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 237-248.

<sup>5</sup>Peckham, Novels, p. 28.

the Way of the Body is characterized by Mornington; the Duke is a man of intellect; and the Archdeacon is a prototype of the mystical hero, the man of will.

Many Dimensions is, in a number of ways, a companion-piece to War in Heaven; both concern themselves with the relationship of nature to supernature, and both "turn about the unity of creation with its ultimate oneness with the transcendent."<sup>6</sup> In Many Dimensions, as with the Graal of the earlier book, the characters fight over a talisman of power, this time the Stone of Suleiman (Solomon) which is capable of transporting its bearer in time and space. This ability to enter and manipulate time and space and to enter it where one chooses has already been shown to be peculiar to conceptualism (if, as in Kant, that doctrine is taken seriously), rather than as merely an element of fancy. But it has further been shown that Williams does not introduce elements of fancy for their own sake. Therefore, the operations of the Stone in the plot are part of a conceptualist understanding of potentiality. Also, the embodiment of spiritual truth in matter (coupled with the free choices of each figure in the book) can only be rationalistic or conceptualistic. The discussion of Lord Arglay, who is certainly, along with his secretary, one of the two principal characters, takes a decided turn toward Aristotelian universality:

There is no case beyond law, the Chief Justice answered. We may mistake in the ruling, we may be deceived by outward things and cunning talk, but there is no dispute between men which cannot be solved in equity. And in its nature equity is from those between whom it exists: it is passion acting in lucidity.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>7</sup>Williams, Many Dimensions (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), p. 156.

The contention here is that no rationalist could have (or would care to have) parlayed the creation of Lord Arglay as an essential perpetrator of action in a novel with a theme entailing the principles of spirit incarnate in matter. Also, more than likely, the rationalist would react adversely to the idea of the Stone; to him it would be purely evil. Only a conceptualist would try to keep all these processes in balance.

On the surface, the plot of The Place of the Lion appears to be rationalistic. The novel speculates on what might happen if the Platonic Archetypes, the Transcendentals themselves, were accidentally unleashed upon the world. It should be borne in mind that a realist could also write about such transcendentals, as could the conceptualist. If, however, will and intellect are separated, and the will is shown superior to the intellect, conceptualism is operative. One of the important characters, Damaris Tighe, has been writing her dissertation on Peter Abelard. Through the years she has become an intellectual snob; when the archetypes are abroad, she has a nightmarish vision of Abelard himself, which affects her in much the same manner that the ghosts in A Christmas Carol affect Scrooge. She recognizes not so much her abuse of other people as in the Dickens story, but rather her abuse of the intellect. As another character later informs her:

You saw what you know...and because it's the only thing you know you saw like that. You've been told about it often enough; you've been warned and warned again. You've had it whispered to you and shouted at you--but you wouldn't stop or think or believe. And what you wouldn't hear about you've seen, and if you're still capable of thanking God you'd better do it now. You, with your chatter about this and the other, your plottings and plannings, and your little diagrams, and your neat tables--what did you think you would make of the agonies and joys of the masters? O I know such things must

be: we must shape the patterns in what they said--man must use his mind. But you've done more than use it; you've loved it for your own. You've loved it and you've lost it. And pray God you've lost it before it was too late, before it decayed in you and sent up that stink [in Damaris's vision, Abelard stank mightily] which you smelt, or before the knowledge of life turned to the knowledge of death.<sup>8</sup>

(This is reminiscent of the stench of Father Zossima, the apocryphal St. Thomas Aquinas figure in Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov.) Almost immediately Damaris recognizes that she should not wallow in self-pity, but "ought" (the Kantian word Williams lingers over in the text, using it thrice in three lines) to aid one of the other characters who is in trouble.<sup>9</sup> This last incident, of course, is an example of will in action and is depicted directly after the intellect is shown to be insufficient unto itself. Later Damaris is to reflect to herself that "interpretations nearly always are wrong."<sup>10</sup> (not knowing the thing in itself.) Whatever may become of her, "Love [will] or wisdom, her act awaited her."<sup>11</sup> Once again, this is conceptualism.

The Greater Trumps is easily the most symbolical of all Williams's novels. Each of the twenty-two trump cards of the Tarot pack play in a wealth of imagery, dense even for this author. Also, it is the hardest of the novels from which to isolate one or two factors for discussion. Suffice it to say that in the background of the history of the

<sup>8</sup>Williams, The Place of the Lion (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 135-136.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

Tarot that Williams invents for the story, among the seventy-eight dancing figurines that correspond to the controlling deck, stands the Fool in the middle as the other figures wheel and gyrate to the Great Dance.

(T. S. Eliot alluded to this motionless character as a source for "the still point of the turning world" in The Four Quartets, with the identical meaning.)<sup>12</sup> Sybil Coningsby--the name symbolism from Lord Beaconsfield's novels is intentional--the mystical heroine, is the only person who can see the Fool move. "Surely that's it, dancing with the rest; it seems as if it were always arranging itself in some place which was empty for it."<sup>13</sup>

Peckham has analyzed this passage at length:

To the person on the road to sanctity, then, the Fool is everywhere at once, indulging in a perpetual exchange with all the figures, so that in naturalistic terms, it is perpetually arriving at the quiet center every fraction of a second, and therefore, always appears to be there; only the sharp eyes of Holy Wisdom can see it dancing everywhere, sustaining all things.<sup>14</sup>

This is the Bonaventuran view of God, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. Thus the central image of the novel contains a mystical heroine who envisions a conceptualistic understanding of the Deity. At the very climax of the book, a golden cloud clears away to reveal this mystic in an act of charity.<sup>15</sup> Williams telegraphs his symbolism as he gathers together all the characters in the denouement.

<sup>12</sup>Grover Smith, T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), pp. 321-322.

<sup>13</sup>Williams, The Greater Trumps (New York: Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 1969), pp. 80-81.

<sup>14</sup>Peckham, Novels, p. 111.

<sup>15</sup>Williams, The Greater Trumps, p. 220.



The three great orders of grace and intellect and corporeal strength, in those immature servants of their separate degrees, gathered round the place where Sybil knelt by Joanna, and the search within and the search without were joined.<sup>16</sup> (*Italics of the three conceptualistic elements mine.*)

That final phrase also indicates the indissoluble continuum that exists between nature and supernature. To a conceptualist, the distinction is formal, and their integration is indicative of the fully mature person. These paragraphs make no sense except as written by a conceptualist.

Descent Into Hell is the only one of Williams's fictions that does not treat the theme of power. Of all his imaginative works, it is the one most redolent of ideas he presents in detail in the non-fiction, especially the themes of exchange, substitution and co-inherence. Pauline Anstruther's aeveternal acceptance of her martyred ancestor's fears, and Peter Stanhope's depiction as an obvious surrogate for Charles Williams himself as the direct mouthpiece for the doctrine explored in He Came Down From Heaven, are but a few of many examples of its relationship to other works in the Williams canon. Probably the most memorable character in the book, and perhaps in all the novels, is Laurence Wentworth. Throughout the course of the book, Wentworth, a highly respected historian, steadily loses grip with the outside world --not because he is afflicted with the popular conception of mental disease, but because he chooses Hell. Since a conceptualist cannot judge his character from the outside, Williams permits the reader to observe Wentworth's thoughts and decisions from the author-omniscient point of view.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

Early in the work, the doomed historian merely decides that telling a lie would be expedient--in this case misinforming the participants in a pageant that their uniform epaulettes are historically accurate when they are not. Step by step the man withdraws more and more from society as the work progresses. The author further shows us the workings of Wentworth's mind:

A remnant of intelligence cried to him that this was the road to mania, and self-indulgence leading to mania. Self-preservation itself urged him to remain; lucidity urged him, if not love. He stood and looked and listened...He went out of the room, down the soft swift stairs of his mind into the street of his mind, to find the phantoms of his mind. He desired hell.<sup>17</sup>

These last three words are not a judgment, but a logical conclusion resulting from the evidence of the character's own mind. For the four monist positions, all truth is totally given in experience. As a result, the disparity constantly stressed in the book between the inner Wentworth and the outer would have no real meaning. Of the dualists, the realist and the rationalist judge people by actions, i.e., the content of one's conduct is viewed as close enough to one's intention that any distinction drawn is superficial. For the conceptualist, wrong action may often spring merely from misinformation or misdirection. Evil (which it will be recalled is a palpable state for the conceptualist) is identical with a pernicious free choice against the nature of things, the Co-inherence that Williams outlines so clearly. In the passage quoted, Wentworth has chosen complete separation (the "In-coherence") from others and receives the fruits of his desire. He then rejects his betrothed for a succubus;

<sup>17</sup>Williams, Descent Into Hell (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), p. 50.

symbolically he has taken his fantasies and other chimeras for the desired object of the will. The more he withdraws, the more he is unable to communicate; he becomes what the modern psychologist would call disassociated. By the novel's end, no one is able to offer him any comfort as he becomes locked in the prison of his mind. Presently, he confronts his main rival as an historian, Sir Aston Moffat:

If he had ever hated Sir Aston because of a passion for austere truth, he might even then have laid hold on the thing that was abroad in the world and been saved. If he had been hopelessly wrong in his facts and yet believed them so, and believed they were important in themselves, he might have felt a touch of the fire...and still have been saved. In the world of the suicides, physical or spiritual, he might have heard another voice than his and seen another face. He looked at Sir Aston and thought, not "he was wrong in his facts," but "I've been cheated." It was his last consecutive thought.<sup>18</sup>

The insistence by the author on the absolute nature of his character's free choice which is not directly perceivable by the outside world is a hallmark of conceptualist thought. Unlike the realist, he is able to will that which is not his own good. To experience the collapse of Wentworth can be harrowing for a reader: "Guns, fast cars and fists are rather tame for anyone who has watched the soul of a Williams character disintegrate."<sup>19</sup>

In his last novel, All Hallows' Eve, Williams makes his most radical use of distorting space and time, both of which are constantly put forth as matters of perception. An obvious instance occurs when the dead Lester Furnival first sees her husband dimly on Westminster Bridge; he

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>19</sup>Review of Descent Into Hell, The Episcopalian, V (Aug. 1965), p. 8.

appears vague and shadowy to her. She is not particularly aware of any time having elapsed since they were supposed to meet. The husband, Richard, simply experiences an apparition of his dead wife a month after she was killed in a bombing raid.<sup>20</sup>

Lester and the other dead girl, Evelyn, pass easily from one time and place to another because they occupy a temporality different from that experienced by the living on earth. Lester's condition, as events prove, is purgatorial; the best that can be said for poor Evelyn is that she may be in a state like the souls in the antechamber of Hell in Dante's Commedia; forever unable to make up her mind, she is a whiner soon to become a whine. They are both moving rapidly to that eternal state "where all times and places coexist simultaneously."<sup>21</sup>

One of the living characters, one of whom has mastered time-space difficulties for evil purposes, can extend himself, although to do so in this life requires a rejection of the Co-inherence. Simon the Clerk for a terrible price has learned how to project several duplicates of himself to important centers of the world, much as the stone of Suleiman could be divided physically in Many Dimensions. Such division is the means of Simon's undoing.

Also, more elaborately treated in this last novel than in any of the others is Williams's idea of the City. The concept of the City in a

<sup>20</sup>Williams, All Hallow's Eve (Boston: Noonday Press, 1971), pp.4-6.

<sup>21</sup>Alice Elizabeth Davidson, "The Fictional Technique of Charles Williams," Indiana University Dissertation, p. 88.

Christian writer immediately conjures up an image of the great Bishop of Hippo. But as Charles Moorman has noted:

Williams makes almost no use of St. Augustine's theory of knowledge, seemingly ready-made for his purposes, and although it is certain that they are largely in agreement as to the certainty of the presence of God's hand in history, one is tempted by Williams's discussion to conclude that in spite of his enormous respect for the African doctor, Williams finds Augustine a rather inhuman and unsympathetic subject.<sup>22</sup>

Precisely what a conceptualist would find inhuman in the saint is his rationalistic framework, in this context, the absolute separateness of the City of God from the City of Man. Here is how Moorman sees the City as Williams understands it in All Hallow's Eve:

...the transition area between life and judgment, but, more importantly, as "the precincts of felicity," the actual Co-inherence of all time and space and matter; the City is the redeemed creation restored to the beauty and holiness of the lost Eden.<sup>23</sup>

Unique to the conceptualist position is that, unlike the Augustinian synthesis, this philosophy makes no cleavage between nature and supernature, as has been established earlier. When Betty's soul enters the purgatorial world from our own, only her mortality prevents her from sharing the same mode of knowing and experiencing as the dead girls:

She had moved on into the thing happening, for here all things were happening at once. These were the precincts of felicity. The felicity of the City knew its own precincts, but as yet, while she was but a vagrant here, she could not know them as such.<sup>24</sup>

The exhibition of conceptualist philosophy and theology are regulative in all seven of Charles Williams's novels is complete.

<sup>22</sup>Moorman, Precincts of Felicity, p. 38.

<sup>23</sup>Williams, All Hallow's Eve, p. 51.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

If it is true that every writer holds a latent system of thought in his work, and if it is also true that by discovering what that system is and then by showing how it is operative in his work the full pattern of his artifact is thereby revealed, then the approach that has been applied in this study has further implications for literary criticism. That has been the hope of its author. As the fragmentary hints that have come from the novels treated in this chapter seem to indicate, the system-construction method of literary criticism can prove fruitful for discussing isolated themes, plots, images and characters from a work, as well as for treating a complete literary production. It is further hoped that other critics who are sufficiently tutored in philosophy and theology as well as in literature will be able to apply this method to other works and authors. A study of, say, William Butler Yeats as rationalist or of Dylan Thomas as idealist would explain much about both the similarities and the dissimilarities in the accomplishments of those two poets. To continue to refuse evidence other than from the received methods smacks of the myopia which from time immemorial has been the bane of scholarship. Alexander Pope's famous dictum for literary critics may well serve as the best motto for the preceding pages:

A perfect judge will read each work of wit  
With the same spirit that its author writ.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Alexander Pope, An Essay on Criticism, ll. 233-234.

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APPENDIX I

APPENDIX I

CHART OF POSSIBLE REAL PHILOSOPHIES

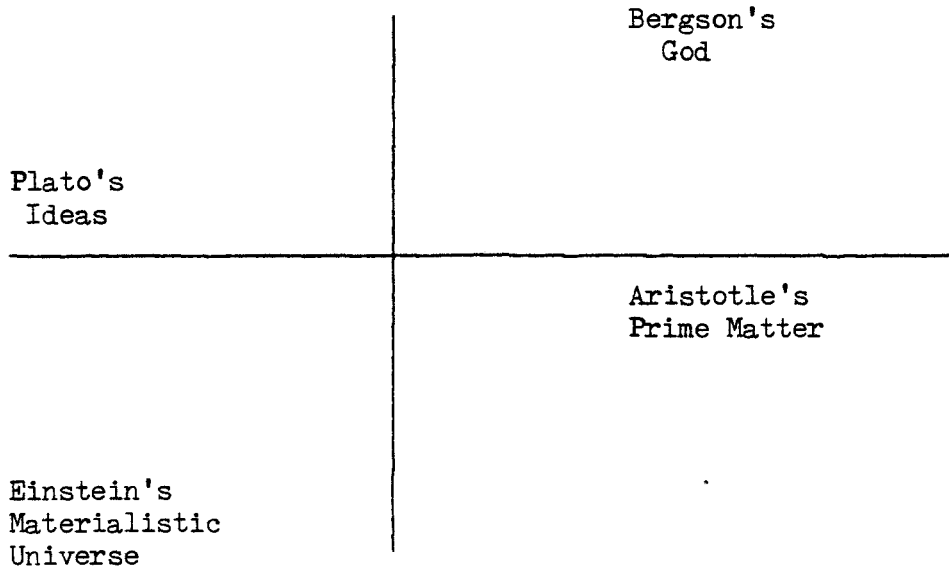
category	(e)	the	(i)	of	(o)	System	Example
Will	intuits		meaning		existence	1. Mysticism	Chesterton
Mind	perceives		categories		essence	2. Idealism	Keats
Body	senses		elements		matter	3. Naturalism	D.H. Lawrence
Agent	alters		utility		relations	4. Pragmatism	Rand
Will	intuits		meaning		existence	5. Realism	Pope
Mind	perceives		categories		essence		
Mind	perceives		categories		essence	6. Rationalism	Wolfe
Body	senses		elements		matter		
Will	intuits		meaning		existence	7. Materialism	Freiser
Body	senses		elements		matter		
Will	intuits		meaning		existence	8. Conceptualism	Hopkins
Mind	perceives		categories		essence		
Body	senses		elements		matter		

APPENDIX II



APPENDIX II

CHART OF IDEALIST PERPENDICULARITY



(N.B. This is the Whiteheadian version of idealistic categories.)

APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Arthur Livingston  
has been read and approved by the following committee:

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

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 17, 1982  
Date

Mark J. Svaglic  
Director's Signature