The Principal Theological Ideas in the Christian Fantasy Novels of Charles Williams

Joan Turner Beifuss
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/1832

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
Copyright © 1963 Joan Turner Beifuss
THE PRINCIPAL THEOLOGICAL IDEAS IN THE CHRISTIAN FANTASY NOVELS

OF CHARLES WILLIAMS

by

Joan Turner Beifuss

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

June, 1963
Joan Turner Beifuss was born in Fall River, Massachusetts, on October 13, 1930.

She was graduated from Will Rogers high school, Tulsa, Oklahoma, in June, 1948, and from MacMurray College, Jacksonville, Illinois, in June, 1952, with the degree of bachelor in arts.

Mrs. Beifuss was a reporter for the Chicago Sun Times newspaper from 1952 to 1955; on the writing staff of The Public Relations Board, 1955-1956; editorial assistant for the Commission on Promotion and Cultivation of The Methodist Church, 1956-1957; and assistant public relations director for The Tuberculosis Institute of Chicago and Cook County (the Christmas Seal organization) from 1957 to 1959.

She is married and the mother of three pre-school children.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. All Hallowes' Eve</td>
<td>All Hallowes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Descent into Hell</td>
<td>Des. into Hell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Descent of the Dove</td>
<td>Des. of Dove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Greater Trumps</td>
<td>Trumps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. He Came Down from Heaven and the Forgiveness of Sins</td>
<td>He Came Down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The Image of the City and Other Essays</td>
<td>Image of City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Many Dimensions</td>
<td>Dimensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The Place of the Lion</td>
<td>Lion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Shadows of Ectasy</td>
<td>Shadows</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. A BRIEF LOOK AT THE CORPUS OF WILLIAMS' WORK</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose and Procedure of Thesis—The Prolific Williams—Words in Conversation and Writing—Biography—Unity of Work—Poetry—Propaganda Aspects—Prose—Combining Ideas and Form</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE SEVEN NOVELS</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification—Supernaturalism—Power Studies—Plot Outlines—Symbolism—Heroes, Heroines, and Adversaries—&quot;Para-normal&quot; Mood—Existentialism—Humor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. EVIL IN THE NOVELS</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evil as Good Perverted—Neutrality of Powers—Modes of Evil—Hierarchy of Evil—Antichrist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. COINHERENCE, THE CITY, SUBSTITUTION AND EXCHANGE</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core of Doctrine—Coinherence—The City, or Men in Coinherence—Attributes of City—Substitution and Exchange—Instinctive—Conscious Compact—Between Living and Dead—Company of Coinherence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. THE AFFIRMATION OF IMAGES</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmation and Negation as Modes of Coinherence—History—&quot;This Also Is Thou; Neither Is This Thou&quot;—Advocacy of Affirmative Way—&quot;Pre-eminent Moments&quot;—Characters of Negation—Characters of Affirmation—The Considine Enigma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. THE THEOLOGY OF ROMANTIC LOVE</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Romantic Love—Sacramental Aspects of Romantic Love—Eros and Agape—&quot;My Eros Is Crucified&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

A BRIEF LOOK AT THE CORPUS
OF WILLIAMS' WORK

The purpose of this paper is to examine the seven novels of Charles Williams and to extract the theology that he is presenting from the supernaturalism and the symbolism, from the strange characters and the even stranger plots.

This work is intended not as a last definitive word on the Williams' novels but rather as a first word, since, so far as this writer has been able to discover, no demonstration of how Williams' theological ideas were shaped into the characters, symbols, and situations of the novels has been attempted in any depth. Once such a demonstration has been made, the novels can be placed in their proper perspective in the corpus of his work and eventually, it may be hoped, the entire body of the work may be assigned its proper place in modern literature.

The problem of the novels is complicated by the fact that general criticism of Williams' work was scant during his lifetime, while in the years immediately after his death in 1945 criticism tended to concentrate on his poetry. It has been only in the last several years that any number of articles specifically on the novels have begun to appear, owing in part to the similarities between Williams' novels and the fantasy novels of
C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien. The Williams' novels always had a hard core of admirers, but it was small, and the idea that these fantastic stories of supernatural events were to be taken seriously was slow in spreading. This idea still has not spread very far, although the inclusion of a chapter on Williams (immediately following those on Lewis and Tolkien) in Edmund Fuller's Books With Men Behind Them (published late in 1962 by Random House) may arouse more interest. So may the first issuance of one of the novels, The Greater Trumps, in soft cover by The Noonday Press, also in 1962.

The format of the novels is not very conducive to serious study unless one is familiar with the theological ideas presented in Williams' non-fiction work, notably He Came Down From Heaven, The Forgiveness of Sins, The Figure of Beatrice, The Descent of the Dove, and a selection of essays edited by Anne Ridler, The Image of the City. Williams himself called the novels "potboilers," and John Heath-Stubbs and Alice Mary Hadfield, the two persons who, in addition to Ridler, have written most extensively on Williams, seem also to share this opinion, concentrating primarily on the poetry.

Because of the dearth of explication of and critical opinion on the novels, this paper will rely primarily on the work of Williams himself. The Williams' conceptions of evil, coinherence, substitution and exchange, the City, the affirmation of images, and romantic theology will be explained in his own words and their exposition in the novels examined. There will be no attempt here to establish the validity or even the orthodoxy of the ideas. They were Williams' own; he believed in them and he wrote about them, and the main question in relation to them is not how valid the ideas are but how validly
he wrote about them.

Realizing that much of Williams' work is not familiar to everyone, owing
in part to the lack of critical opinion mentioned above and in part to the
fact that many of the books are somewhat difficult to obtain, this writer
has included a short, very generalized section on all of his work.
Additionally, since launching into a discussion of the theological ideas of
the novels without some comment on the symbolism, characters, plot, and tone
of them would throw the ideas into a disastrous literary vacuum, a chapter of
criticism from a purely literary standpoint has been included.

The corpus of Williams' work is large and varied, and the word "prolific"
hardly does justice to the amount of writing that he produced from the time he
went to work for the Oxford University Press in 1903 until his death, while
still employed at the Press, in 1945. He wrote seven volumes of poetry, some
dozen dramas, the seven novels, five books of criticism or literary essays,
three theological volumes, eight historical biographies, and an impressive
number of pamphlets, articles, and reviews. In addition, he worked full time
for the Press, rising from the position of proofreader to that of an editor.
He did not take time off to write; he wrote amid the intensity of all the
other demands upon him, including those of ordinary home life with his wife
and son and an evening position as lecturer on literature in the London City
Literary Institute. He wrote throughout the Second World War when the Press
was transferred to Oxford where his office desk was a board over a bathtub,
and where he roomed at a friend's home. He lived only three months after
publication of his seventh and most original novel, All Hallows' Eve, and his
critical discussion of the Arthurian cycle material, edited and completed by his good friend C. S. Lewis, was published posthumously under the title of The Arthurian Torso.

He wrote poetry about the Welsh Arthurian bard Taliesin and a play about Thomas Cranmer. He wrote a history of witchcraft and a history of the Holy Spirit in the Christian Church. He edited the work of Kierkegaard and the second edition of Gerard Manley Hopkins. He wrote of Beatrice in The Divine Comedy and of Christ in the Passion.

And he talked! Throughout all of the biographical material available about Williams run the descriptions of his talking. To T. S. Eliot, meeting him for the first time about 1930:

He talked easily and volubly, yet never imposed his talk; for he appeared always to be at the same time preoccupied with the subject of conversation, and interested in and aware of, the personalities of those to whom he was talking. One retained the impression that he was pleased and grateful for the opportunity of meeting the company, and yet that it was he who had conferred a favour—more than a favour, a kind of benediction—by coming.

And Eliot much later, after their friendship had been established, commented:

Williams never appeared to wish to impress, still less to dominate; he talked with a kind of modest and stirring eloquence. His conversation was so easy and informal, taking its start from the ordinary trifles and humorous small talk of the occasion; it passed so quickly and naturally to and fro between the commonplace and the original, between the superficial and the profound; it was so delightfully volatile, that one was not aware, until after several meetings, of an exceptional quality about it; and appreciation of its value came all the more slowly because of his quickness to defer and listen. There was also a de-

---

ceptive gaiety in his treatment of the most serious subjects.

W. H. Auden described Williams thus:

When I met Charles Williams I had read none of his books; our meetings were few and on business, yet I count them among the most unforgettable and precious experiences. I have met great and good men in whose presence one was conscious of one's own littleness; Charles Williams' effect on me and on others with whom I have spoken was quite different; in his company one felt twice as intelligent and infinitely nicer than, out of it, one knew oneself to be. It wasn't simply that he was a sympathetic listener—he talked a lot and he talked well—but, more than anyone else I have ever known, he gave himself completely to the company that he was in.

Alice Mary Hadfield, who worked with him at the Oxford University Press and who emerges from the pages of her "critical biography," An Introduction to Charles Williams, as one of the most devoted and uncritical followers any author could desire, tells of talking with him in his office, at the turn of the stairs, over coffee after his Institute lectures. C. S. Lewis describes weekly meetings during the war years at Oxford with Williams, Tolkien and other members of a congenial group who met solely to talk. As a platform speaker Williams was described by Eliot as "certainly unusual" with "mannerisms which uninspired speakers should most sedulously avoid," including never being still, jingling coins in his pocket, sitting on the edge of the table and swinging his legs, and pouring out his speech in a torrent. Eliot adds that Williams left with his students "the contagion of his own enthusiastic curiosity."

---

2Ibid., p. xi.
4Eliot, p. xii.
These passages on Williams' conversation have been mentioned because his conversation seems to be almost an outward reflection of his writing. Granting some exaggeration in the description, his life was a torrent of words expressing his ideas and arousing an enthusiasm similar to his own, especially among those who knew him well. He lived in his written words and in the exchange of words with others.

A less dramatic life than Williams' can hardly be imagined. His mother and father operated a small stationery and artists' materials shop in St. Albans, near London. He attended only two years of University College because of financial difficulties, and at eighteen went to work in the St. Albans Methodist bookrooms. Four years later he joined the staff of Oxford University Press and moved to London, which he did not leave except for short trips until the war forced the Press to Oxford. He was in Paris once in his life. He met his future wife, the Michal of the early poems, at a church party while they both were teaching Sunday School in St. Albans. There seems to have been no thought in his mind that he would ever marry anyone else, although he was almost thirty years old when they finally married. He was raised in the Church of England and never left it, never, indeed, seems to have gone through any period of struggle over religion. Yet out of this life, bounded by London, the Press, and his family, came such original writing that much of it defies classification and is credited with being the source of some of T. S. Eliot's ideas and devices; an influence on the C. S. Lewis Christian fantasy trilogy, Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, and That Hideous Strength; a help to Dorothy Sayers in her translations and criticisms on Dante; and a real force
in the return of Auden to orthodox Christianity. Lewis says of the influence of his personality, "One kept on discovering that the most unlikely people loved him as much as we did."

Frankly, the critic considering Williams' torrent of words is almost inundated by the profusion of images, of color, of real feeling as opposed to sentimentality. It comes as something of a revelation, then, after reading some half dozen books to realize that the same ideas predominate in all of them. The forms are different; the moods are different; but in all of the later and infinitely stronger work are found the terms (or their equivalents) that are the basis of his work—co-inherence, substitution and exchange, the City, and the others.

Heath-Stubbs, noting that lack of critical work on Williams makes it very "difficult to arrive at a balanced estimate of his place in English literature," states that it is the later poems "by which he would certainly have wished to be primarily judged." As mentioned before, Ridler and Hadfield are also of this opinion, while, with Heath-Stubbs, they acknowledge that he is much more widely known for the novels.

It is certain that the poetry was written out of sheer love, out of first


love. His first published work was a volume of poetry, *The Silver Stair* (1912), privately financed by Alice and Wilfred Meynell. He might have written reviews, essays, even novels for money, but there was no remuneration in the poetry, and it was with the poetry that he was most greatly concerned. It is only in the poetry that an attempt is made to create a new form. Heath-Stubbbs contends that Williams succeeded, and that with the publication of *Taliessin Through Logres* in 1938, he emerged "as a mature poet. The style of these poems is wholly original, and fully as 'modern' in its own way as that of T. S. Eliot."

The subject matter of the Taliessin cycle (which also included *The Region of the Summer Stars* [1947]) is a reworking of the Arthurian theme, and a reworking in a way that finds its source in Williams' main theological ideas. It has been said that no one now will be able to re-interpret the Arthurian epic without considering the Taliessin poems. Williams' conception of the figure of Galahad alone contains insights that are wholly original and arresting. Since this thesis, however, is concerned primarily with the novels and since Williams himself left copious notes on the Taliessin poems, it is not necessary to probe into the poetry here. The poetry is terse yet at the same time full of romantic, or what might better be called heraldic, in the Arthurian context, languages and images, and the entire thought pattern is intensely complex.

---


A few lines are quoted here merely for the sake of illustration. This passage from "The Son of Lancelot" describes how Merlin, disguised as a white wolf, takes the Child Galahad from Helayne and carries him to the convent at Almesbury:

Between the copse on the coast of Broceliande galloped the great beast, the fierce figure of universal consumption, Lupercal and Lateran taint of truth, love's means to love in the wolf-hour, as to each man in each man's hour the gratuitous grace of greed, grief, or gain the measure pressed and overrunning, now the cries were silent in Lupercal, the Pope secret on Lateran. Bristen in Helayne's chamber heard the howl of Lancelot, and beyond it the longer bowl of the air that gave itself up to Merlin; she felt him come, She rose, holding the child; the wolf and the other, the wind of the magical wintry beast, broke together on her ears; the child's mouth opened; his wail was a song and a sound in the third heaven.

...........................

... small and asleep,
and warm on the wolf's back, the High Prince rode into Logres.

It is the poetry that Williams considered his most important work, but it is also the poetry that is the most complex in structure and in the structuring of his main ideas within it. It is very difficult to understand without reference not only to his own notes and to the exposition of Anne Ridler who has considered the poetry carefully, but also to his other work, novels, drama, and essays. Yet it is also true that to understand the novels one must understand, or at least be familiar with, the poetry as well as the drama and the essays, for there are few other English authors whose work is so interwoven. (Perhaps the historical biographies, Bacon, James I, Rochester,

---

and the others can stand alone, but they are minor exceptions and probably
the worst of his writing.) Eliot contends that this unity exists not only in
the work but also between the author and the work, to an infinitely greater
degree than is meant by such phrases as "we cannot separate the author from
his work," but this assertion can only be proved by the few who knew him.
The unity of the corpus of the work itself, however, is beyond question.

Williams was a propaganda writer, if that term can be understood in its
basic sense. He was dealing in all his writing with good and evil and love.
He was advocating spiritual regeneration. Hadfield says, "He was a man who
lived and expressed 'a mystery,' a hidden knowledge. He learned it through
his own life, and looking at it with amazement, wrote it throughout his
work ..." The words "hidden knowledge" could be questioned—if there was
anything Charles Williams was not, it was gnostic, and to him this "hidden
knowledge" was quite plain to anyone who looked for it—but at the same time
it is true that he had a great vision and that he spent his life trying to
communicate both it and his amazement at it.

In an article on religious drama he wrote, "Propaganda does not destroy
art ... But there is a condition, and it is that the design must not be imposed
from without. The propaganda must be the inevitable result of the art ...
Propaganda, if any, of the idea must arise from within, and be created by style.

---

11Eliot, p. xi.

But we must not neglect style . . ."

Williams knew full well the power of his writing—that it could seriously change the view of life of those persons who accepted as true his view. His primary purpose, however, was to create an imaginative experience from which his ideas of life would simply and naturally arise. He wrote to communicate this imaginative experience. It was well and good if he changed anyone's opinions, but he would not sacrifice style to do so.

He was a propaganda writer in that he consciously set out to communicate ideas which could cause changes in the reader. He was an artist in that he attempted to present these ideas as an integral part of the entire imaginative experience he was creating. There is nothing incompatible in being both propagandist and artist, although such a course does require a great deal of control over the subject matter and more especially over the writer's own enthusiasms.

He did not always succeed in this control. For example, of his study of Dante, The Figure of Beatrice, Hadfield says:

If publishers would not publish the books he wanted to write, he would agree to write the books they were willing to publish. It did not make very much difference, for the same book was written in the end. I doubt if Faber & Faber expected what they got in The Figure of Beatrice, which was to be 'a book on Dante.' C. W. made of it an examination of the spirit of love in the sphere where it is most susceptible of analysis and definition, the sphere of human relationships.


\[14\]Hadfield, p. 194.
It is true that Dorothy Sayers did and other Dante scholars do regard *The Figure of Beatrice* highly, but it would seem that especially in critical studies of, or literary essays on, the work of another author, the critic should not impose his own views on that material or use it as a vehicle for his own ideas, no matter how important these ideas may seem. Williams has so used Dante in *The Figure of Beatrice*, which is the great non-fiction exposition of his idea of romantic theology. Dante may have knowingly or unknowingly expressed these ideas, but not, perhaps, to the extent that Williams would have it. All books should not be the same book in the end, and this criticism of *The Figure of Beatrice* would apply also to many of Williams' reviews and articles in the *Reader* collections.

On the other hand, *The Descent of the Dove* is the tracing of his ideas through the history of the Christian Church, and here the result is quite different, perhaps because of the much greater scope in time and space of the subject matter. The book gives Williams' ideas of the workings of the Holy Spirit in history, not only within the organized Christian Church, or Churches, but also within areas reacting against Christendom and thereby causing changes, as the barbarians, the Muslims, and Marx. The reader gains a vision of the entire Christian world continually in motion, expanding, contracting, its ideas constantly interacting within itself, e.g., in the Reformation or Kierkegaard. Williams' courtesy toward those who have opposed the organized Church, his exposition of the "quality of disbelief" among Christians, and his wryly humorous outlook, combined always with a passionate love of the Church, are combined with his own ideas and the result is quite
effective. Two passages from The Descent of the Dove will be quoted to illustrate his style in such a non-fiction work and to show, to some small extent, his approach. The first concerns the mass conversions of the early Church; the second, Soren Kierkegaard.

In fact it is doubtful whether Christendom has ever quite recovered from the mass conversion of the fashionable classes inside Rome and of the barbaric races outside Rome. Those conversions prepared the way for the Church of the Middle Ages, but the forcefulness of the conversions also prepared the way for the church of all the after ages. It is at least arguable that the Christian Church will have to return to a pre-
Constantine state before she can properly recover the ground she too quickly won. Her victories, among other disadvantages, produced in her children a great tendency to be aware of evil rather than of sin, meaning by evil the wickedness done by others, by sin the wickedness done by oneself.  

He [Kierkegaard] considered experiences in a new manner; say, using the old word, that he caused alien and opposite experiences to coinhere. He was the type of a new state of things in which Christendom had to exist, and of the new mind with which Christendom knew them. He lived under a sense of judgment, of contrition, of asceticism; but also (and equally) of revolt, of refusal, of unbelief. Almost always before his days one of these two things had triumphed over the other; or, if not, if there had been others like him, then their words had been so lightly read that it was supposed that one had triumphed. No doubt, as soon as Kierkegaard becomes fashionable, which is already beginning to happen (The Descent of the Dove was published in 1939), this fate will fall upon him. He will be explained; the other half of him (whichever that may be) will be excused .... He forbade us resignation; he denied tragedy; he was a realist and unbeliever—both in this world and in the other; and his life of skepticism was rooted in God .... He has turned Catholics into agnostics, for they have not been able to bear that synthesis of reconciliation which cannot be defined except in his own terms. He has turned agnostics into Catholics, for they have felt in him an answer of the same kind as the question, an answer as great as the question. Most Christian answers to agnosticism seem not to begin to understand the agnosticism; they seem to invoke the compassion of God. In Kierke-

gaard one feels that God does not understand that kind of compassion.

The Descent of the Dove obviously was written for popular consumption. His major theological work, He Came Down from Heaven (The Faber and Faber edition also contains The Forgiveness of Sins) explains in a much more technical manner most of the theological ideas that are traced in the novels. Again, his theological ideas are incorporated into the facts of the Incarnation and the forgiveness and justice of God, but again, as in The Descent of the Dove, his own ideas rest more easily in the midst of the Christian dogmas themselves than they do in Dante's conceptions of the dogmas in The Divine Comedy. It seems easier for Williams to state his ideas directly than to elicit them from the words of other authors.

The purely imaginative work, the novels, poetry, and drama, show the least strain between the propagandist and the artist. The novels, it is true, do show points of strain (see Chapter III) but these are not between the basic ideas and the plots, characters or symbolism. They come from other causes. The dramas, also, are free from any feeling that Williams' ideas have been imposed on the plots rather than rising from them, although most of the plays are written in the somewhat artificial miracle or morality play form, which in itself forms something of a barrier to today's audience.

\[\text{Ibid. pp. 212-214}\]

\[\text{For instance, Seed of Adam is a nativity play with the usual characters of Mary, Joseph, and the Three Kings, but also included in the cast are Adam and Eve, and the mother of the Third King. The result is added depth and breadth. The writer of this paper was able to attend a trial performance of Williams' Grab and Grace, presented by the Elmhurst Community Players at one of their meetings. The play was later presented at a Christian students' con-}\]
In the fields of poetry and the novel he was most free from restrictions of form or subject matter, although Eliot notes, "Much of his work may appear to realize its form only imperfectly; but it is also true in a measure to say that Williams invented his own forms—or to say that no form, if he had obeyed all its conventional laws, would have been satisfactory for what he wanted to say."

It is the quality of the subject matter that sets Williams apart from his contemporaries. As has been mentioned previously, the validity of his specific theological ideas will not be discussed here, but the quality of his imaginative experience in which these ideas are found and the words in which in the novels they are expressed will be, for here is the basis on which his position in literature must rest.

---

reference at Elmhurst College in June, 1962. Frankly surprising was Williams' deft dramatic touch, for the plays read almost like closet dramas with few stage directions, while character development is either quite lacking or quite obvious. Despite the fact that neither the cast nor the audience at the Elmhurst production were familiar with Williams' ideas, Grab and Grace was acted and received very well. There is a wild gaiety about the play, despite its serious subject matter on the temptation of man, and the broad slapstick scenes are quite humorous. Whether either the audience or the cast caught more than just a glimmer of Williams' serious thought is questionable; nonetheless, watching Pride, Man, Hope, Hell, Gabriel and the whistling boy Grace go through their antics on stage was delightful.

18 Eliot, p. xiii.
CHAPTER II

THE SEVEN NOVELS

At the outset it must be said that the seven novels of Charles Williams, though frankly supernatural, are very difficult to categorize. As both Eliot and Heath-Stubbs note, they are completely outside the mainstream of contemporary literature. Eliot compares Williams in some respects to Chesterton, Poe, Walter de la Mare, Montague James, Le Fanu, and Arthur Machen, but adds that the comparison cannot be carried very far because these authors, with the exception of Chesterton, turn thrills into sensationalism and exploit the supernatural:

The stories of Charles Williams, then, are not like those of Edgar Allen Poe, woven out of morbid psychology—I have never known a healthier-minded man than Williams. They are not like those of Chesterton, intended to teach the reader. And they are certainly not an exploitation of the supernatural for the sake of the immediate shudder. Williams is telling us about a world of experience known to him; he does not merely persuade us to believe in something, he communicates the experience he has had. 19

Heath-Stubbs classifies them as "metaphysical thrillers" of the same literary genre as the works of Le Fanu, Machen, James, and Algernon Blackwood, a literary tradition which is an offshoot of the Gothic novel, "which, whatever its entertainment value, criticism does not feel called upon to take seriously. ... Yet the reader (of Williams) quickly becomes conscious of a

19 Eliot, pp. xiv-xv.
factor which distinguished his work from other writers of this kind. The supernatural is being taken seriously, and is being brought disconcertingly close to our own experience."

Both Heath-Stubbs and Eliot seem to regard the supernatural aspects of the novels as the primary basis for comparison with other authors. Yet for Charles Williams the dichotomy between spirit and matter did not exist. In the world of his novels there is a coinherence or unity between all forms of intelligence. There are certain barriers; the living have their place, the superhuman or the dead theirs. Ideas do not sit down to supper with actualities. But there is nothing frightening about the author's approach to other worlds. His characters are frightened, but only until they understand the coinherence of the universe. Williams approaches the supernatural with awe, with courtesy, but not with fear.

The frightening aspects of the novels are the evil aspects, but the evil is found only in men, not in the spirits of the departed or in the powers of magic devices such as the Tarot cards or the beasts of the Platonic ideas. These powers are neutral, as neutral as they can be in a God-centered universe. These powers simply are. It is men's struggle to control the powers that comprises the basis of the novels.

W. R. Irwin, in his study of the novels of Williams, Lewis, and Tolkien, comes to the conclusion that the novels of all three follow the pattern of the romance in which the hero seeks adventure and becomes involved in cosmic

---

20 Heath-Stubbs, pp. 7-8.
struggles on which depends the fate of the world—a reworking of the paradise story in which the world is always saved or regained. "Always these romances show the right order threatened to the point of desperation; but always they assert eternal providence and justify the ways of God in the triumph of his order. This is a doctrinal and artistic formula."

Of the three authors, Williams, Tolkien, and Lewis, Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings trilogy is the classic example of Irwin's theory, but both Lewis and Williams follow this "doctrinal and artistic formula" closely. Williams differs the most from the formula because of his emphasis on sacrificial love in the restoring of the right order. And, on a lesser level, Williams' heroes and heroines differ in that they certainly do not seek out adventure; they are just going on about their business when suddenly their business becomes the salvation of the world through the intervention of a golden lion or a doppelganger or the Holy Grail. This method makes a less classical romance, but a better story. Thus it appears that Irwin has a far stronger case than Heath-Stubbs or Eliot in choosing company for Williams' novels. Edmund Fuller also saw the similarities between Lewis, Tolkien, and Williams and devoted a chapter to each in Books With Men Behind Them.

---


22 Irwin, in the same article, touches on a point which has intrigued this writer since she became familiar with Lewis, Tolkien, and Williams. He says, "They are contributors to a powerful campaign to show man that his world and his soul have become a wasteland and often to urge as a consequence one kind or another of regeneration through a rediscovery of unified spiritual values." (p. 577). It is the use of the term "powerful campaign" which arouses interest, as if Irwin means a conscious campaign. This author has long wondered if it is
That the supernatural is an integral part of the novels but not Williams' primary reason for writing them has been noted by a number of critics who say much the same thing in different words: Charles Nörrman in *Arthurian Triptych* says, "Williams' novels are far from being simply supernatural adventure stories. They are in the first instance novels about morality and religion among men." George Parker Winship, Jr., notes, "Actually our conscious materialism is often but a defense against the terror of the supernatural .... The material universe is not the whole of existence; there is the Creator above and all around are forces not measured by the laboratory .... Williams' wildest fantasy is a means of approaching stern reality." C. S. Lewis comments, "The frank supernaturalism and frankly blood curdling episodes have deceived many readers who were accustomed to see such 'machines' used as toys and who supposed what was serious must be naturalistic—or worse still that what was serious could not be gay."

possible that these writers, in addition to perhaps Sayers and Eliot and a few lesser figures, have set out consciously and in concert to "redeem the time," each in his own style of writing. It is not so much that they are Anglicans as that they are such powerful advocates of orthodox Christianity. It must be coincidence, yet it seems a very remarkable coincidence that such a cohesive body of Anglican literature should appear within the relatively short period of the last thirty years among a group who were familiar not only with each other's work but also with each other.


The Williams novels are studies in power. Each is concerned with a man or a group of men who seek power both in this world and in that other world by means of perverting a supernatural object or person or idea for their own designs. These men would breach the right order of life. They may be termed "the adversaries," although only in the first book, *War in Heaven*, are they presented as mere black magic figures. The adversaries become more dimensional as Williams continues writing, while at the same time they move from the desire for power for a specific purpose (Stephen Persimmons in *War in Heaven*) to the desire for power for its own sake (Simon the Clerk in *All Hallowe'en Eve*). Around the central adversaries are gathered a group of followers who in their weaker ways also attempt to gain power or to benefit from the power achieved by the adversaries.

Pitted against the adversaries and their followers are the heroes and heroines of the novels, most of whom are quite ordinary people who at the outset have not the faintest idea of the forces with whom they are dealing. Yet they all have one thing in common; they are true to love or to poetry or to simple courtesy or good will among men. They must open themselves to the power that comes through the things to which they are true in order to triumph over the adversaries. They are sometimes killed in the process, but the adversaries are annihilated—and Williams would make a great distinction between death and annihilation.

It is too simple, if not erroneous, to say that these are novels about good struggling against evil; what they are about, to seek the most common denominator, is the struggle between men motivated to seek spiritual or super-
natural power falsely and men motivated to seek that power as truly as they can.

Here are very brief plot outlines of the seven novels:

War in Heaven (1930). The Holy Grail is believed to have been found in a small parish church in England. Seeking to gain control of it and of the power flowing through it are a devotee of black magic and several Eastern "mystics," who are "in the Way." Urged on by Sir Giles Tumulty, explorer and anthropologist, who is interested only in coolly observing the whole affair, they try to steal the Grail. United to protect the Grail are the archdeacon of the church, who will not have the chalice defiled, whether it be the Grail or not; the poetic Duke of North Ridings, who fights in behalf of the Grail with all the honor of his Catholic heritage; and the romantic literary clerk, Kenneth Mornington, fired by the medieval legends. The Grail is stolen, restored, stolen and restored again through the intervention of the legendary Prester John, who suddenly appears. At the climax Mornington dies for it; the archdeacon dies at the foot of the altar after Prester John celebrates Mass with it; and the Grail disappears, having powerfully affected all who were concerned with it. The sub-plot concerns the adversaries' attempt to steal a small child for use in the black rites and to destroy the mind of the child's mother.

Many Dimensions (1931). Sir Giles Tumulty, one of the adversaries of the first novel, has gained possession of the Stone of Suleiman [Solomon], which contains the Tetragrammaton, the holy Name of God. Tumulty is conducting experiments with it—the Stone moves in time, space and
thought—and selling "pieces" of it. Seeking to regain it for the glory of their household of Faith are the Persians. Coming gradually to the realization that the Stone is the First Matter from which all spirits and material things were made are the Chief Justice of England and his young secretary Chloe Burnett. They believe that the Stone must be restored or unified again with God. There is every sort of scrambling for the Stone. Chloe moves from love of love through the love of law or justice into a void in which she desires only that which the Stone desires, its restoration, and, with the help of the Chief Justice, she submits herself to the power of the Stone for that end. The Stone is restored and she dies. Subordinate material concerns others who desire to control the Stone, ranging from a mayor who wants it to heal his sick townspeople to an American financier who wants to set up a transportation company with it.

The Place of the Lion (1931). The principles of Plato, strength, beauty, wisdom, etc., assume their primordial bestial shapes and are released into the world through the workings of the shadowy figure of an "adept" and his study group in a small English town. As one by one the "beast principles" make their appearance, they absorb into themselves their animal counterparts. For example, millions of butterflies are absorbed into The Butterfly. Human beings also begin to be drawn by the Principles; a strange destruction of the world begins. Drawn into this situation by an accidental glimpse of The Lion are Anthony Durant, who has
a passion for truth, and his fiancé, Damaris Tighe, who has divorced philosophy and life. Anthony eventually saves Damaris and the rest of the world by the Naming of the Beasts after the manner of Adam.

The Greater Trumps (1932). Descendants of a gypsy tribe attempt to gain control of a certain deck of the mysterious Tarot fortune-telling cards whose trump suit corresponds with, and presumably controls, a dance of small golden figures, the Dance of Life. As in the preceding novels, the motives for desiring the power vary from person to person in the conspiracy. Nancy Coningsby, the daughter of the cards' owner, is engaged to Henry Lee, one of the conspirators who tries to obtain the Tarots through her. Her father, who understands nothing, and her aunt, who alone of all the characters understands the dance of the figures and the function of the Fool figure in it, move with Nancy to thwart the release through the Tarots of the elements of earth, air, fire and water in a blinding storm. The cards are brought under control; the danger to the world is averted; and the characters are left to examine themselves in the light of what has happened.

Shadows of Ecstasy (1933, but drafted some six years earlier). Turmoil breaks out in Africa under the leadership of a man proclaiming the second evolution of man under the banner of the adoration of love, "believe, imagine, live." His ultimate objective is the conquest of death and release of the powers that will bring. The mysterious leader is revealed as an Englishman, Nigel Considine, already more than a hundred years old and invincible to death by age or disease. Drawn through his
love of poetry into the possibility of this great expansion of man's power is Roger Ingram, a brilliant young professor of applied literature. He joins Considine as a small group of hari-kari Africans invade England. Fighting to stop Considine, in addition to all civilized governments, are an Anglican priest and Inkamasi, a Christian king of the Zulu. At the height of the invasion holocaust, Inkamasi kills himself and Considine is killed by a traitor. Ingram returns home, changed but waiting—for what is left unspecified.

Descent into Hall (1937). There are three parallel plots in this novel set within the general framework of the production of an original play by the community of Battle Hill. Peter Stanhope, the playwright, frees Pauline Anstruther from the fear of her doppelganger by taking her fear unto himself. Pauline, in turn, is free to bear the fear of a long-dead ancestor, burned at the stake by Mary Tudor. Pauline's aunt is able, through love, to save from eternal damnation a workman who has committed suicide. And Lawrence Wentworth, a noted and reputable historian, descends into hell by first violating his scholastic integrity and eventually by deceiving himself to such an extent that he imagines that one of the girls in the play has become his succubus. Meanwhile play production continues, and on and beneath the Hill the uneasy dead begin to move and breach the land of the living through the efforts of a Lilith-type creature, Lily Sammile. There is no clearcut triumph at the end of Descent into Hall although the situation is reversed from that of
**Shadows of Fantasy.** In the latter the world was saved but there was some
doubt about the future of Ingram. In *Descent into Hell* the characters
are saved, but there is at least some doubt about the repulsion of the
uneasy dead.

**All Hallowe'en Eve** (1945). The heroine Lester is dead from the beginning of the
story. She is wandering about in the state immediately after death be-
fore her steps are irrevocably placed on the path toward eternal life or
eternal death. The story is told from her viewpoint. A friend, Evelyn,
killed with her, is with her now. Trying to breach the frontier they
have already crossed is the adversary, Simon the Clerk, who has built up
a world-wide reputation as a prophet, gathered hordes of his followers,
and is seeking all power. He controls and uses as his tool in this under-
taking a school friend of Lester and Evelyn, Betty. Lester saves Betty
from the Clerk and from the evil desires of Evelyn, whom she is unable
to save; the Clerk is destroyed by his failure to gain full power over
Lester or Betty. Allied against him also are Betty's fiance and Lester's
husband. The Clerk is destroyed by a combination of the spirit of the
living and the spirits of the dead.

As is apparent from these short summaries, the plots of the novels may
certainly be termed strange, weird or wild. Yet the weirdness comes not from
the basic plot structure but from the supernatural and symbolic devices within
which the plots are enclosed. This paper deals with Williams' theological
thought, but some brief comments on the symbolism are essential to an under-
standing of the theological content and to illustrate the depth of the
material with which he dealt.

The blatantly black magic devices, such as ointments for union with evil in a witches sabbath, the sticking of pins into waxen figures, attempts to unite souls and bodies, need no explanation, and, as Williams himself wrote in the introduction to *Witchcraft*, "No one will derive any knowledge of initiation from this book; if he wishes to meet 'the tall, black man' or to find the proper method of using the Reversed Pentagram, he must rely on his own heart, which will, no doubt, be one way or another sufficient." These devices are used in the novels to show evil at its most disgusting although not at its most dangerous.

One of the most interesting aspects of the mythology and symbolism is that it is not Christian in the usual sense. The ideas are very Christian, but the overt symbolism, with the exception of the Holy Grail in *War in Heaven* and the extensive symbols in *All Hallow's Eve*, is drawn from many different sources and cultures. Ridler presents some necessarily sketchy (secrecy being a Rosicrucian essential) material on Williams' association in his early years with the Order of the Golden Dawn or one of its offshoots, a Rosicrucian order which at varying periods numbered among its members Aleister Crowley, W. B. Yeats, Evelyn Underhill, Arthur Machen, and A. E. Waite. In the rituals and symbols of the Order's cosmology Williams probably found the Tarot cards, the angelic hierarchies, and the supernatural principles of the parts of the body. This last became an especially intimate part of his work in the *Taliessin* cycle. In the initiation ceremony of the Order, the novice was threatened by death from a hostile current which corresponds with the death of
Mornington in *War in Heaven*. It would seem accurate to say that Williams' short association with the Order (and this association seemed not to be in conflict with his firm commitment to the Church of England) gave him an introduction to a body of mystical symbols which he was later to use for his own purposes. Probably because he learned of many of these symbols through living ritual rather than through research, he was later to imbue them with great vitality.

In using the Grail in *War in Heaven*, Williams naturally fell heir to all of the Grail legends in English literature from Mallory through Tennyson and into the modern poets. He is dealing here with a myth symbol familiar to most readers. The Archdeacon says of it, "In one sense, of course, the Grail (sic) is unimportant—it is a symbol less near Reality now than any chalice of consecrated wine. But it is conceivable that the Grail absorbed, as material things will, something of the high intensity of the moment when it was used, and of its adventures through the centuries." The protectors of the Grail, the Duke, Mornington, and the Archdeacon, are Bors, Percival, and Galahad, the three figures in *Morte d'Arthur* who achieve the Grail and carry it safely to Carbonek. Like Bors, the witty and urbane Duke never loses sight of the facts of the world, his family, his religion, and his humorous belief that the "world was created as a sewer for stars." Mornington, like Percival, is completely absorbed in the Quest, while the be-spectacled

---

26 Ridler, pp. xxiii-xxvi.

Archdeacon reaches the final symbolic union with Galahad as he dies at the feet of the altar and the Grail.

The one obscure symbol in War in Heaven is Prester John, the legendary Christian priest-king of the East, possibly of the Abyssinian area, whose name was mentioned by medieval travelers and around whom a large body of mysterious lore gathered. He appears near the end of the novel and is the prime mover in the resolution of the plot. But his exact symbolism remains vague. He says: "I myself am king and priest and sire to all priests and kings." "I am the precursor of things to be. I am John, Galahad, Mary!" "I am Prester John. I am the Grail and the Keeper of the Grail. All enchantment has been stolen from me and to me the Vessel itself will return." He is also Christ; as he celebrates Mass with the Grail, he becomes the Christ figure; this symbolism had been prefigured when he said to Norrington a short time before the latter's death, "Surely I come quickly. Tonight thou shalt be with Me in Paradise," and later, "I am myself, and I am He that sent me!" It would seem, then, that Prester John performs the same function as the Grail; he is a living sign through which the power of God is loosed in the world. The sign retains its own identity (priest-king) and at the same time becomes a channel of power. He is an example of Williams' idea that power can be used only by those who are completely in union with the power (c.f. Chloe in Many Dimensions). He is also an example of a weak literary device, the deus ex machina, and it must be assumed that he was brought into the plot solely for his symbolic value, since the plot itself could have been resolved very adequately by allowing the power to flow through the Archdeacon rather
than through Prester John.

The Stone, the End of Desire, which is the source of power in the second novel, Many Dimensions, also remains somewhat vague. It contains the Tetragrammaton on it (or in it, for the markings go all the way through the Stone). The use of the reversed Tetragrammaton is one of the strongest of the black magic devices. The Tetragrammaton consists of the four consonants which the Jews used to represent the name of God, which with its vowels made the complete name and was too holy to speak; the closest English equivalent is Yahweh (Jod-he-vau-he). The Stone was given by God (or since the name of God is seldom used in the novel, by the "Mercy" or the "Permission" or the "Transcendence") and placed in the crown of King Solomon, the wise judge.

Law, or more specifically justice, is the theme of the book. The Stone is governed by the law of itself. As the Persian Hajji says, "... it will do nothing for itself of itself, neither divide nor reunite. One Stone has no power upon its Types [pieces] unless they are under the will of a single mind!" Chief Justice Arglay and Chloe are deeply involved in Arglay's study of organic, or fundamental, law. It is only when Chloe has put herself completely in the Way, or law or desire, of the Stone that it is restored. But what the Stone is meant to be, whether the concept of it comes from somewhere in the Rosicrucian rites or from the rather more prosaic magic stones found in many legends and fairy tales, is difficult to determine. While much of Williams' own language can be used to describe it, it being "the Way and

the end," its actual reference to any Eastern mythology or cult remains
vague. Accordingly, the novel itself remains somewhat vague and one rather
hates to see Chloe submit to and die for something which neither the other
characters nor the reader can readily comprehend.

In *The Place of the Lion* the mythological background is spelled out much
more clearly. As one of the characters, Foster, explains to Durant, the
world was created by the entrance into matter of certain great principles,
wisdom, courage, strength, beauty, and others. These principles have been
humanized in the Christian hierarchy of angels and archangels. The principles'
concern with the world comes because of their union with matter. What their
concern is among themselves, man does not know. The principles, or powers,
are mingled in people, but much less so in the beasts; it might be said that
the powers are the archetypes of the beasts. For example, the lion is strength
or authority; the butterfly, beauty; the lamb, innocence, and so forth.
Generally, matter is the means of separation between the principles and the
beasts, but if one beast should be brought into the tremendous influence of
one of the principles, perhaps through the intense concentration of a man,
then the matter of the beast might be changed into the image of the principle.
If this change became widespread, among beasts first and then among men, this
entire world might be drawn into that other world of pure principle.

This is exactly what begins happening in the novel. As the great shapes

of the image-beasts begin to move about, people, too, are drawn into their power according to each person's dominant characteristics. Thus Durant is drawn by the glorious Eagle of wisdom and self knowledge, while to Damaris the Eagle appears as a horrible Pterodactyl because she has perverted knowledge. One who seeks holiness is drawn by the Unicorn into union with God, while another who has sought to destroy begins turning into a Wolf. Probably the most interesting and horrible change is that of one character into the Crowned Snake of cunning and deceit. Another interesting piece of symbolism shows the 'adept,' the man who loosed the powers, and his house burning steadily for days, causing perplexed remarks among the fire fighters. One swears that the house looks just like a nest through the flames; another remarks that they will be seeing a bird in the nest next. Obviously the 'adept' is being absorbed into the Phoenix.

When Durant saves the world by naming the beasts at the end of the novel, he is following the Genesis story in which the Lord God gave Adam command over all the beasts, fish and fowl. Durant is thus showing again man's authority over the beasts.

The Tarot cards in The Greater Trumps are fully explained in the introduction by William Lindsay Gresham to the 1950 edition of Pellegrini and Cudahy. Common opinion, Gresham says, is that the Tarots were brought into Europe around 1400 A.D. and were used for fortune telling by the gypsies. The cards consist of four major suits, staffs, cups, swords, and coins (or deniers or pentacles), representing respectively the elements of air, water, fire, and earth, and of twenty-two symbolic picture cards, the Major Arcana
or Greater Trumps. Some scholars believe that the cards originated in ancient Egypt, while others trace them to Fourth Century Alexandria and the Neo-Platonic discipline. Williams seems to have considered them more ancient than the Fourth Century, though, because of the Egyptian god and goddess mythology he associates with them in the novel. The Greater Trumps' pictures have a number of meanings, and Gresham has tried to list the meanings Williams is using. For instance, one card pictures the Empress who is also the great Nature Mother, both loving and cruel; another has the Juggler or Magician who is the creator and operator of illusions behind which lies the reality; a third shows the Hanged Man representing the sacrifice leading to the secret at the heart of the world. There is no Trump card for man; he rather is the Tarotist. As the cards are placed, they show his relationship to God and the universe, and the man or Tarotist himself becomes part of the Dance, or the pattern of the cards.

Perhaps the most difficult mythic symbols are those of mad Joanna and of the Fool figure in the Dance. Joanna seeks the golden images and Tarot cards with a hot lust, dreaming of being the High Priestess of the Dance. She has long imagined herself a part of the Dance and believed that her child, who died immediately after birth, was destined to be the Mighty One in the measure of the Dance. She believes that she is Isis, the Egyptian goddess of fertility, wife and sister to Osiris, the god of the underworld and judge of the dead, and she calls her dead child Horus, god of the sun. In short, she

believes herself the mother of Messias. When Nancy saves the world from the invasion of the elements released by the Tarots, Joanna sees in her the Messias she seeks.

The figure of the Fool seems to stand still in the center of the Dance of the little images of the Greater Trumps. Only Nancy's Aunt Sybil sees it move, and to her it moves so quickly all over the board, moving in and out among the other dancers, that all of their movements relate to it. Because Sybil sees the Fool move, she is considered a seer and an initiate by the Tarot adepts, although to Sybil herself there is nothing remarkable about her power. She is the most truly religious person in the novel. As for the meaning of the Fool, Ridler says flatly that it is the reconciling figure of the Dance of the Tarot figures, or the Dance of Life, the energy of Creation, the "uncovenanted flame of the Holy Ghost," beyond good and evil, the point at which laughter and tears are equal. If the Fool is the reconciling unity of the Dance of the Tarots, then Sybil is the reconciling unity of the dance of the characters in the novel.

In Shadows of Ecstasy and the last two novels, Descent into Hell and All Hallow's Eve, there is a new dimension in Williams' symbolism. No longer is there a definite article such as a Grail or a Tarot card. Instead Williams is dealing with ideas of power rather than with the power itself, so the imagery evoked becomes more abstract and at the same time more free. The

---

power coming into the world is channeled through persons, and while the
earlier use of mythology may give great universality to a theme, the use of
personality less shackled by mythology gives more psychological depth.

The figure of Nigel Considine is fascinating, not only to the character
Ingram who follows him but also to the reader. He is damnably attractive
in the most literal sense of the word. The religion he preaches sounds
simple: "The business of man is to assume the world into himself. He shall
draw strength from everything that he may govern everything." "He that
masters death has mastered the other." In other words, Considine believes
that the energy expanded in all human ecstasy can be transmuted and used to
master other elements in life and eventually death itself. He is something of
a perverted Christ figure, for his ultimate aim is not the exaltation of him-
self as the adversaries in the other novels desired to be exalted, but the
regeneration of the world. Since the Christian world cannot believe, for
example, that energy can be extracted from love making and used to master
death, or, for that matter, that the conquest of death is the ultimate aim
of life, Considine finds his most fanatical followers among the African
tribes whose animism has not been "corrupted" by the religious thinking of
the Christian culture. It is this very vitality that draws Ingram to Con-
sidine, for they both know that poetry is an ecstasy and that power exists
in it. Ingram says, "... he knows what poetry is, and I've never met a man
before who did." The Zulu king is drawn to Considine because he understands
what tribal kingship is and that power exists in it. It is the Christianity
in the Zulu Inkamasi that opposes Considine, not the kingship in him. And
it is the Christianity of the Anglican priest Caithness that causes him to become allied with one of Considine's followers who kills his leader. The killing was done so that the traitor could gain a large cache of jewels destined for the temple of Jerusalem. It is Ingram who makes the Christ associations with Considine when he compares Caithness to Caiphas, as when he had thought earlier, "Lord of hosts! he had known the lord of hosts when he was called Considine, and rode on a bat's back." The immediate hosts he is thinking of are Considine's African troops, black as bats, but in view of Considine's later betrayal and death, the image is more significant, especially since it also unites Considine and the words of Shakespeare, the greatest poet. Considine is a perverted Christ figure, appealing both to the children of darkness, the Africans, and to the child of light, Ingram. Considine will be considered further in Chapter V.

In Descent into Hell the dominant symbolism concerns the rope with which the workman hangs himself, a rope that becomes a symbol of the descent into hell of other characters, and the locale of the story, Battle Hill itself. The Hill is described as long and low-lying, not unlike the shape of a man, and many of the characters seem to move in action with or in reaction to the Hill. Regarding the shape of the Hill, Moorman in Arthurian Triptych goes so far as to say that Battle Hill is Adam and that the temptation and damnation of Wentworth is the Fall. On the other hand, Ernest Beaumont suggests that the title of the novel means more than Wentworth's descent into hell: it also means Margaret Anstruther's descent into hell to save the workman,

32Moorman, pp. 85-88.
paralleling Christ's descent into hell; thus Battle Hill is Calvary. Battle Hill is a microcosm of the world. In that it is described in bodily terms ("along the torso," "the ridge of the arm"), it could possibly be compared to Adam, although Williams' predilection for comparing geography to the body (cf. the Taliessin cycle) tends to weaken this theory. On the other hand, the inclusion of the Idilith character, Lily Sammle, strengthens it. Certainly Wentworth falls on the Hill as Lily has already fallen. In the sense, too, that sacrifice is completed on the Hill through Margaret's saving of the suicide, the Hill can be compared to Calvary. The substitution and exchange between Pauline and Stanhope also parallels Calvary. Either of these theories, if their authors do not demand the exclusion of the other, can be substantiated. And in view, also, of much of the activity taking place on the Hill, one can hardly fail to consider the phantasmic references to Comorrah.

Williams himself says specifically that "The Hill's chronicle of anguish had been due, in temporalities, to its strategic location in regard to London, but a dreamer might have had nightmares of a magnetic attraction habitually there deflecting the life of man into death. It had epitomized the tale of the world." Briton and Saxon had fought there. Medieval feuds, the War of the Roses, petty quarrels, had all scarred it. Its castle had gone up in flames as had its manor house. A peasant farmer had burned there

---


under Mary Tudor; a Jesuit had been betrayed there under Elizabeth I.

Margaret Anstruther says of the Hill:

Here there had, through the centuries, been a compression and a culmina-tion of death, as if the currents of mortality had been drawn hither from long distances to some whirlpool of invisible depth ... from all places of predestined sepulchre, scattered through the earth. In these places the movement of human life had closed—of human life or human death, of the death in life which was an element in life, and of those places the hill on which she lived was one. An energy reposed in it, strong to affect all its people, an energy of separation and an energy of knowledge. 35

It is obvious that the hill is a contact point between the living world and the world of the dead. It serves the same purpose as the Grail or the Tarot cards in a much more complicated way. And here, for the first time in a Williams novel, is found a description of the state of being which is beyond death. The workman who has hanged himself on the Hill is not a mere ghostly shade. He sees; he thinks; he experiences; and the reader is privy to thoughts and feelings. He is the forerunner of that world of the newly dead which Williams was to develop to such a great extent in All Hallows’ Eve. The dead man moves over and around and in the Hill.

Williams was experimenting with points of passage of power between the worlds in the novels. In the first three he used inanimate objects, Grail, Stone, Tarots. In The Place of the Lion he considered the passage of power through ideas, although the ideas did take on the form of beasts. In Shadows of Ecstasy the emotions theoretically were considered as the passage, although the personality of the ‘adept’ Considine was so strongly drawn that this fact

35Ibid., p. 90.
is easy to overlook.

It is not until the last novel, All Hallows' Eve, written just before Williams' death, that persons alone are used for the release of power. Simon the Clerk is using his own child Betty to force passage into the world of the dead. When Lester, already dead, becomes a part of Betty's life, the Clerk tries to use her also, but fails. There are many touches of black magic in the book. The Clerk casts Betty into hypnotic trances, sticks pins in a waxen figure, creates a body for a dead woman, and even has imagined himself into two other identical clerks who are wandering the world. If Condign is something of a perverted Christ figure, Simon the Clerk bears some resemblance to Antichrist (cf. Chapter III). There are hints that in this one character are others, Simon Magus, the Wandering Jew. And stated quite specifically are the facts that the Clerk is of the Jewish priestly line, descending from Abraham, that when the Jewish priesthood turned away from its predestined End, Christ, it turned toward another End which was neither Jewish nor Christian but would destroy both. It is the power of domination over both the material and spiritual world that the Clerk seeks, not through the shoddy magic of the Black Mass or profanations of the Sabbath (although he would not be adverse to either), but primarily through the deeper sorcery of which profanations and buried sensualities are but the facade.

It is when Simon, enclosed in his magic circle, forgets the discipline of Goetia and desires only to kill that he is destroyed, although his demise had begun earlier when he refused to believe the news Betty brought him of the future. "He encouraged his mind into illusion. Illusion, to the magician
as to the saint, is a great danger. But the master in Geste has always at the center of his heart a tiny, everlasting illusion; it may be long before that point infects him wholly, but sooner or later it is bound to."

Everything around him is destroyed when Betty, whom he has used as his channel for power, steps inside the circle and the power of that other world turns against him through her, deluging him; water beats down everything. He is destroyed by the power he sought to control.

Several of the characters see the Clerk as an insect and as the Lord of the Insects, although the name Beelzebub is never used. Indeed, all of the symbolism in the novel is Christian-oriented, the first time Williams has so written since he used the Grail and its associations in War in Heaven. Water is a primary image. Betty, through whom salvation comes, dimly remembers from her childhood being immersed in a river and seeing a large fish swim past—baptism and Christ. The great torrents of water that destroy the Clerk, and the rosiness associated with the waters are symbols of grace wiping out sin and of the commingling of Christ’s blood with water. As Lester takes unto herself the destructive force administered by the Clerk against Betty, she feels as if she is resting on a crossed bar of wood—the Crucifixion. And the title All Hallowe’en Eve is self-evident. As the vigil eve of the feast of all saints, it is commonly associated with sorcery and the spirits of evil. Williams, of course, is using the vigil as a time when

---

all evil rises against all good, against the saints whose joyous feast is the next day.

With so much emphasis on ideas and symbolism, it would seem almost inevitable that the characterizations in the novels would suffer, and they do to some extent—a few to a very great extent. Some of the heroines, notably Betty in All Hallows' Eve, Nancy in The Greater Trumps, and Chloe in Many Dimensions, leave the reader quite unmoved, and this is a bad flaw since it was not Williams' intention to show salvation coming through banality. Chloe's motivations are never clear in regard to the Stone, and while Nancy and Betty are clearly motivated by love for their fiancés, they seem unaware of the nature of the crises in which they play major roles. The redeeming devotion felt for them by the young men, and especially Phillip's for the selfish Rosamond in Shadows of Ecstasy, is most commendable—and quite unbelievable.

It would seem that Williams had trouble, as many other authors have had, in transcribing innocence into vitality. He handles goodness well, but his "good" characters, Sybil in The Greater Trumps, Margaret Anstruther in Descent into Hell, and the Archdeacon in War in Heaven, are not innocent. That is, they are innocent of evil, but they have an intimate knowledge of its existence, and therefore their goodness becomes more powerful.

Several of the women characters achieve real warmth, notably Barbara in War in Heaven, Isabel in Shadows of Ecstasy, and Lester in All Hallows' Eve. It is interesting to note that these three women are wives rather than sweethearts and that, especially in the case of Isabel and Lester, they are completely loyal to their husbands' ventures although they are aware of the short-
comings of these ventures. Consider how deftly Williams sketches Lester, keeping in mind that she will sacrifice herself for her husband, her friend, and for an acquaintance she does not even like:

Though they [Lester and her husband Richard] had been feisty and quick-tempered egotists and bitter of tongue, they had been very much in love and they had been fighting their way. 37

Never in her life had she contemplated so final an end which was no end [her death]. All change had carried on some kind of memory which was encouragement. She had not always supposed it to be so; she had told herself, when she left school, when she married, that she was facing a new life. But she had, on the whole, been fortunate in her passage, and some pleasantness in her past had always offered her a promise in the future. This however was quite a new life. Her good fortune had preserved her from any experience of that state which is—almost adequately—called "death in life;" it had consequently little prepared her for life in death. She was quite an ordinary and rather lucky girl and she was dead. 38

Lester had no lack of courage. She had always been willing to, as it is called, "face facts," indeed her chief danger had been that, in a life with no particular crisis and no particular meaning, she would invent for herself facts to face. She had the common vague idea of her age that if your sexual life was all right you were all right, and she had the common vague idea of all ages that if you (and your sexual life) were not all right it was probably someone else's fault—perhaps undeliberate, but still their fault. 39

Lester is the highest development of Williams' heroines. She is the only one who shows real character development. The other women change, most of them for the better, but only Lester remains truly warm and vivid as she turns toward goodness—a rather ironic situation since Lester is the only

37 Ibid., p. 6.
38 Ibid., p. 8.
heroine who is dead.

Williams has a surer touch with the heroes. Most of them are urbane, literary, witty, rather cynical, and quite skeptical until they realize the meanings of the crises in which they find themselves. At this point they throw themselves heart and soul into the struggle, although they never lose the gaiety which made them so charming in the first place.

The reader knows little or nothing of the background of the main characters in the novels. He is therefore completely dependent on the phrases that the author uses to establish character. Some of these touches are very effective. In *War in Heaven* Rackstraw has a "sense of the fantastic and dangerous possibilities of life, a sense which dwelled persistently in a remote corner of his mind, never showing itself in full, but stirring in the absurd alarm which shook him if his wife was ever late for an appointment... he found that a concentration upon his wife had helped to steady and free him." Mornington's Christianity "enabled him to despise himself and everyone else without despising the universe." Sir Giles, regarding Persimmons' black magic attempts, remarks tartly, "I don't care what insane May dance you're up to, but I won't be dragged in." To the Duke of North Ridings the world "was created as a sewer for the stars." These few descriptive lines establish important facets of each of the characters.

To Chloe in *Many Dimensions* it seemed that "all things did just so much and no more. As... she reviewed activities and preoccupations, there appeared nothing that consumed more than a little part of her being, or brought her, by physical excitement or mental concentration, more than forgetfulness."
Nothing justified her existence. The immortal sadness of youth possessed her, and a sorrow of which youth is not always conscious, the lucid knowledge of her unsatisfied desires." Anthony, in *The Place of the Lion*, thinks of Damaris as "a child with her face against the windoupane looking for the rain to stop so the desired satisfaction might arrive." Damaris' outlook is recorded in these two passages: "Theories which were interesting in Plato became silly when regarded as having anything to do with actual occurrences. Philosophy was a subject, her subject, and it would have been ridiculous to think of her subject as getting out of hand." "Religion and butterflies were necessary hobbies, no doubt, for some people who knew nothing about scholarship, but they were not of the smallest use to Damaris Tighe, and therefore, as far as possible Damaris Tighe left them out of her life." 

Nancy's irritable father in *The Greater Trumps* never "insisted on seeing facts wrongly, although he did a busy best to persuade the facts to arrange themselves according to his personal preference." Roger Ingram describes his job at the university in *Shadows of Ectasy*:

I embalm poetry there—with the most popular and best smelling unguents and so on, but I embalm it all right. I then exhibit the embalmed body to visitors at so much a head. They like it much better than the living thing, and I live by it, so I suppose it's all right. No doubt the embalmers of Pharoah were pleasant enough creatures. They weren't called to any nonsense of following a pillar of fire between the piled

---


41 Williams, *Lion*, p. 81.

42 Ibid., p. 24.
waters of the Nile!

And in a one sentence answer Considine cements Ingram’s character. He says, "It’s burning in you now." Peter Stanhope, the playwright in Descent into Hell, though "never negligible, was often neglected; he was everyone’s second thought, but no one’s first."

The preceding quotations show something of Williams’ ability to catch character in a few words. However, it is true that some of the lesser characters are types. There is the housekeeper, the hearty doctor, the kindly old nurse, the upstairs maid. It is also true that a few characters have a disconcerting way of turning up in more than one novel under different names. There are, for example, Miss Wilmot and Lily Sammile, Lord Justice Arglay and Sir Bernard Travers. It is true, as mentioned previously, that there is a surface sameness about the heroes, Anthony, the Duke, Ingram, Stanhope. These facts mar the author’s work and cannot be overlooked because he wrote quickly and did not consider the novels of major importance in his literary life.

The heroes cannot be called men of action. They do a lot of talking and a lot of thinking, but most of them seem rather amazed when they actually do take physical action—as amazed as the Duke of North Ridings as he finds himself speeding over the English countryside in a sports car that also contains the Holy Grail. The characters are not well-rounded. It is not only that the reader does not know what they look like or the numerous little details of

their daily lives, but that the reader never sees them under "normal" conditions and is unable to make comparisons with their characters under conditions of crisis. No flashback techniques are used.

Yet the leading characters, while they may not be complete, are not flat, nor are they caricatures, nor are they symbols (as one might expect and fear to find them). They are lively and vital for the most part. They do not just represent humanity in its encounter with the adversaries; they are humanity. It is unfortunate that Williams chose to depict, or was capable only of depicting, certain aspects of humanity, but the aspects he does depict, the intellect, the will, loyalty, the search for truth, are important, and there is a wide range of leading characters. Both Ridler and Heath-Stubbs have overlooked this fact. Because Williams uses the same basic plot structure in each of the novels, he would have found it easy to use also the same characters, varying them only enough to fit the different backgrounds and symbols. This Williams has not done. Sybil and Margaret Anstruther may be similar, but they are poles apart from Lester. Ingram and Stanhope may both be literary, but there the resemblance ceases. If Williams achieves a solid place in literature it will not be because of the characters in the novels, but it is equally true that if he is forgotten this will not be the fault of the characters either.

Several other aspects of the novels should be mentioned. One is Williams' incredible ability to create a mood, to describe a state of being which Eliot terms "para-normal." Eliot says the events in the stories are "vehicles for communicating a para-normal experience with which the author is familiar, for
introducing us into a real world in which he is at home." This communicated "para-normal" experience is most dramatic in the descriptions of the world of the newly-dead in which the workman in Descent into Hell and Lester in All Hallow's Eve find themselves. There are chilling descriptions of this world, a state of being ungoverned by time, space, density, sight, touch. And yet it does not seem beyond the realm of possibility; it is a recognizable world. To Lester there is still London; the Bridge is there and the shops are there, but they have become a part of something far less finite than London.

The Archdeacon absorbed in the chiming joy of the Grail, Stephen Persimmons traveling to the witches Sabbath, Damaris facing all terror at the beak of the giant Pterodactyl probing through her study window, Margaret Anstruther absorbed in love for the workman, all these states are not just described; they are, as Eliot says, communicated. They become real, and the reader accepts them as being as real as the common states of being hungry or in love or cold. Williams certainly never experienced the state of the newly-dead; it is hoped he never experienced the witches Sabbath or the terrors of Damaris Tighe. Of those states of love found in the novels, it is impossible to know how much he personally knew. But it is apparent he believed in the objective existence of these states of being and that he saw nothing particularly remarkable about them.

There is a feeling of something akin to existentialism in the novels. As has been noted above, Williams was one of the first editors of Kierkegaard

\[\text{Eliot, p. xiv.}\]
in England and quoted admiringly from him in The Descent of the Dove. Hadfield describes the existentialism found in Williams thus:

C. W.'s mind was deeply and naturally "existential," though it had other saving qualities as well. Existentialism in this context might be focused on the phrase "Not what it is but what it is!" This kind of life is produced by, and produces, a sense of crisis working on the mind and heart. Everything is on the point of change; an enormous and hardly grasping threat or "other" quality rises in every detail on which the mind turns; our very existence all but slips from us at times in the pressure of crisis and becoming—becoming what, we dare not say, but either something wildly different from ourselves, or sheer loss.45

Williams writes on Kierkegaard:

It is impossible to be proud of experience: that happens. One can never be anything but humble about that ... he saw his own times as an effort to be without "the unconditional." "Let the race, let each individual, make the experiment of doing without the unconditional—it is a whirlpool and remains such. In the meantime, for a longer or shorter period, it may seem otherwise, it may seem like stability and security. But at the bottom, it is and remains a whirlpool ... To live in the unconditional, inhaling only the unconditional, is impossible to man; he perishes like the fish forced to live in air. But on the other hand, without relating himself to the unconditional, man cannot, in the deepest sense, be said to 'live.'"46

One more quotation might be helpful for the explanation of the existential mood or tone of the novels. Henry Aaron in The Greater Trumps muses on the failure of the experiment with the Tarots and says:

But the dark fate that falls on all mystical presentations, perhaps because they are presentations only, had fallen on this. The doom which struck Osiris in the secular memory of Egypt and hushed the holy, sweet, and terrible Tetragrammaton in the ritual of Judah, and wounded the Keeper of the Grail in the Castle of the Grail, and by the hand of the blind Hoder pierced the loveliest of all the Northern gods, and after all these still everywhere smote and divided and wounded and overthrew

45 Hadfield, p. 77.
46 Williams, Des. of Dove, pp. 217-218.
and destroyed, by the sin of man and yet by more and other than the sin
of man, for the myth of gods and rebellious angels had been invoked—
by reason, no doubt, to explain, but by something deeper than reason to
frame the sense of the dreadful necessity in things; the need that was
and yet must not be allowed to be, the inevitability that must be denied,
the fate that must be rejected, so only and only by such contradictions
of mortal thought did the nature of the universe make itself felt by
man.47

Williams is not an existentialist in the classical or Kierkegaardian
sense, though since Kierkegaard the term has been used for all sorts of strange
bedfellows from Sartre to Auden. Williams' belief in the ultimate right
ordering of the universe sets him apart from many modern authors, yet his use
of certain elements that are associated with existentialism makes him modern
in tone.

The elements of the existential which underlie the novels are briefly
these: 1) a sense of the coinherence of paradox, i.e., the good and at the
same time evil potential of the released powers; 2) the leap into the abyss of
the unconditional by so many of the characters who act with no assurance of the
outcome, as most dramatically in the death of Mornington; 3) the sense of the
dreadful necessity of the nature of life, both the necessity for the adver-
saries who would plumb the depths of human potency to plumb also—though they
be doomed from the beginning—the depths of evil and the necessity of the
heroes to defend right order, even when this seems inevitably doomed; 4) the
"quality of disbelief," i.e., the skepticism of such involved characters as
Chief Justice Arglay, Ingram, even Anthony.

This "quality of disbelief" was as much a part of Williams as his ortho-

dox belief and it might be illuminating to quote a few lines of his definition of it in The Descent of the Dove:

It is a quality of spirit ... It is a manner, a temperament, a nature which may be encouraged or discouraged; it is most particularly not irony, though irony may be an element in it. It is a qualitative mode of belief rather than a quantitative denial of doctrine ... It is entirely consistent with sanctity. Yet undoubtedly it also involves as much disbelief as possible. It allows for, it encourages, the sense of agnosticism and the possibility of error. It hints ambiguity—nicely balancing belief and disbelief, qualifying each by the other—and allowing belief only in necessary right proportion of decisiveness.

This quality of disbelief is a strong factor in the courtesy of so many of the characters toward others whose beliefs should put them into direct opposition—Sybil and Joanne, Mornington and the Archdeacon, Anthony and Richardson.

The final attribute of the novels to be considered is the humor. Like the characters themselves, most of the humor is witty, wry, ironic, softly satiric. It is found in all of the novels, although to a much lesser extent in the final and darker All Hallows' Eve. In Many Dimensions many of the situations and characters, the American financier, Oliver Doncaster, the first healing at Rich, are frankly farcical, but in the other novels the humor is integrated more subtly in conversation, in description, and in character.

The character of Damaris Tighe, for instance, is described with delicate irony. Damaris, in The Place of the Lion, is so involved with her doctoral thesis on "Pythagorean Influences on Abelard" that she is completely oblivious to the Platonic "angelicals" or ideas that have become reality; and Damaris

---

48 Williams, Des. of Dove, pp. 189-190.
is plagued by the lack of intellect among her contemporaries:

"...But it's interesting too—comparing different ways of saying things and noting the resemblances."

"Like Shakespeare, I suppose?" Mrs. Rockbotham asked, and for a moment took Damaris by surprise.

"Shakespeare?"

"Haven't they found out where he got all his lines from?" her friend asked. "I remember reading an article in Two Camps a few weeks ago which shows that when he wrote, 'Egypt, you are dying,' he was borrowing from somebody else who said, 'England is dying because sheep are eating men.' Marlowe or Sir Thomas More?"

"Really?" Damaris asked with a light laugh. "Of course, Shakespeare's not my subject. But what did he mean by sheep eating men?"

"It was something to do with agriculture," Mrs. Rockbotham answered. "He didn't mean it literally."

"Of course not," Damaris agreed. "But the lamb's become so symbolic, hasn't it?"

"Hasn't it?" Mrs. Rockbotham assented. 49

In Descent into Hell there is a running debate that becomes quite hilarious on the virtues and vices, blocking and moving, costuming and naming of the chorus in the play being produced. In fact, Williams takes the occasion of the novels to chuckle over a number of persons or situations with which he was familiar—editors, poets, literary magazines, research scholars, amateur theatricals. And far from being a distracting element in a novel whose chief aim is serious, this light-heartedness adds a further depth to the humanity depicted. This is direct humor or comedy to be definitely differentiated from the states of exalted gaiety or joy in which the characters sometimes move. This humor would seem to bear out Eliot's feeling that Williams was a "gay and simple man, with a keen sense of adventure, entertainment, and drollery." 50

49Williams, Lion, p. 34.

50Eliot, p. xviii.
It is within the framework of the novels, worked out through these plots and these characters, colored by this symbolism, touched by this existential darkness and bright humor, that Charles Williams puts his theological beliefs into action. The ideas are explained in the non-fiction. In the novels, as in the poetry and drama, the ideas are accepted by or are an integral part of the characters who act upon them; in a sense, Williams sends his ideas into the market-place, and while the validity of the ideas cannot be judged from this market-place of his own making, the way in which Williams saw these ideas transcendent in the human situation can be judged.
CHAPTER III

EVIL IN THE NOVELS

Despite all the occult trappings with which Williams surrounds evil in the novels, the evil is the very orthodox Christian deprivation of good. He says this clearly in The Forgiveness of Sins, referring to definitions of both St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine. "It is therefore part of that knowledge that he should understand good in its deprivation, the identity of heaven in its opposite identity of hell, but without 'approbation,' without calling it into being at all." Williams goes on to say that God's knowledge of evil is not man's knowledge—that man must experience evil in order to know it. Mornington and the Archdeacon touch briefly on God's knowledge of evil:

"'Does He will Gregory Persimmons?' Kenneth asked wryly.

'Certainly He wills him,' the Archdeacon said. 'Since He wills that Persimmons shall be whatever he seems to choose....'

'He wills evil, then,' Kenneth said.

'Shall there be evil in the City and I the Lord have not done it,' the Archdeacon quoted."


52 Williams, War in Heaven, p. 180.
Of the fall of man, Williams says:

It was merely to wish to know an antagonism in the good, to find out what the good would be like if a contradiction were introduced into it. Man desired to know schism in the universe. It was a knowledge reserved to God; man had been warned that he could not bear it—"in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." A serpentine subtlety overwhelmed that statement with a grander promise—"Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Unfortunately to be as gods meant for the Adam, to die, for to know evil for them, was to know it not by pure intelligence but by experience. It was, precisely, to experience the opposite of good, that is the deprivation of the good, the slow destruction of the good, and of themselves with the good ... They knew good; they wished to know good and evil. Since there was not—since there never has been and never will be—anything else than the good to know, they knew good as antagonism. All difference consists in the mode of knowledge.3

Accordingly, when Williams writes of supernatural power, this power is never evil. There are modes of knowing it, of trying to control it, that are evil, but Williams is no Manichean; he grants no power in itself to evil. The powers loosed on the world in novels such as The Place of the Lion or The Greater Trumps threaten destruction to all mankind, yet are not of themselves and in themselves evil. This power turns to destruction upon those who would destroy and to salvation for those who call upon its glory to save.

In the cases of the characters on the side of the right order of the universe who die as a result of their contact with the powers, either horribly as Mornington or in rapt submission as Chloe, there is the implicit belief of Williams that death is not the greatest evil, in fact, perhaps not an evil at all.

Evil, then lies in the way of knowledge of the good, and when the way of knowledge is somehow perverted, evil becomes a reality to be experienced.

353 Williams, He Came Down, pp. 123-24.
This perverted way of knowing good, of experiencing it as evil, is sin, and although Williams never uses the word in the novels except through an ecclesiastic such as the Archdeacon or Caithness, the fact that the adversaries are sinful or sinning or in sin is clear.

In *He Came Down from Heaven*, Williams says of sin, "Sin has many forms, but the work of all is 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 ... two chief modes of existence: impiety against man and impiety against God—the refusal of others and the insistence on the self." There is a more frightening correlation in *The Descent of the Dove*: "Deep, deeper than we believe, lie the roots of sin; it is in the good that they thrive and send up sap, and produce the black fruits of hell."

It would be too simple to classify all of the adversaries under the headings of "impious against man" or "impious against God," since, granting human nature, the areas overlap, but it is easy to see these two categories behind all of the evil depicted in the books.

The modes of evil are many. In the earlier novels, the motivations to evil are simpler; they grow more complex as Williams reworks the subject. In *War in Heaven*, Persimmons uses the "temporal achievement of his power to enter into those lives which he touched and turn them out of their security into a sliding destruction." Quite simply, he hates other people and wants to destroy

---

55 *Williams, Des. of Dove*, p. 108.
them; he seeks the Grail for this purpose.

Higher in the hierarchy of evil is Manasseh the Jew who wants to destroy the Grail itself:

Because it has power ... it must be destroyed ... Don't you understand that yet? They build and we destroy ... One day we will destroy the world. What can you do that is as good as that? Are we babies to look to see what will happen tomorrow or where a lost treasure is or whether a man has a gluttonous heart? To destroy this is to ruin another of their houses, and another step towards the hour when we shall breathe against the heavens and they shall fall. The only use in anything for us is that it may be destroyed. 56

Dimitri the Greek is the farthest advanced "in the Way" of the occult and of evil, and his desire goes beyond the destruction of the Grail or even of the world; he desires only the nothingness that the destruction will bring:

But in the end there is nothing but you and that which goes by. You will be sick at heart because you will be nothing, nothing but a passing in the midst of the passing to weariness that is you. All things shall grow fainter, all desire cease in that sickness and the void that is about it ... For when the body is drawn into the spirit and at last they fall, then you shall know what the end of desire and destruction is ... I have no tears and no desire. I am weary beyond all mortal weariness and my head is sick and my eyes blind with the sight of the nothing through which we fall. 57

This is evil on a grand design, the negation of all creation, evil for the sake of evil which is itself negated. Not until Evelyn in All Hallows' Eve does a character so full of the desire to destroy appear, and Evelyn's motives are petty and pathetic.

There are characters impelled to betrayal and evil by the selfish motives of pride (the Persian Prince), or greed for money (Reginald Montague and

56 Williams, War in Heaven, p. 144.
57 Ibid., p. 145.
Colonel Mottreux), or of desire for prophetic power (Aaron Lee). There is Mr. Foster, who wants to be stronger than others, and poor Frank Lindsay, who destroys his friendship with Chloe because of his pitiful desire to pass an examination. There are pitiful characters, using pitiful modes of evil.

Williams turns his attention far more seriously toward those characters who consciously pervert the truth as they know it, "the preference of an immediately satisfying experience of things to the believed pattern of the universe," who resort to illusion. In the first two books Sir Giles has perverted his character as a scientist, as a cool observer of facts. Once he observed; now, in encouraging Persimmons in his experiments with black magic and in actually conducting experiments with a disregard for the people involved with the End of Desire stone, he violates his role as observer by influencing the facts for his own perverse enjoyment. Prester John prophesies that in the end Sir Giles will be watched as he has watched others descend into the Pit, and that he will scabble in the Universe like an ant in the smooth inner side of the Grail.

Damaris Tighe is almost lost because she has perverted her search for philosophical truth, and Lothair Comingsby, Nancy's father in The Greater Trumps, becomes something of a minor hero, despite his complete lack of sympathy for or understanding of any of the happenings, because he "never insisted on seeing facts wrongly."

Lawrence Wentworth begins his descent into hell by starting to cheat just a little on his historical research in order to outwit a fellow historian. It is a small betrayal of truth at first; by the end of the book he lives com-
pletely in illusion with a succubus, not only unable to accept any reality, but hating all reality. This slight distortion of truth, these beginnings of illusion that grow into wild denials of all truth and right order, lead to the destruction of Lily Semmle and of Miss Wilmot, and to the near destruction both of the residents of Battle Hill and of Joanna.

Mrs. Wallingford, Betty's mother in *All Hallows' Eve*, may serve as an apt illustration of Williams' comment that evil grows out of good. She has moved with Simon the Clerk through numerous evils on to murder, but her original motivation was love for the Clerk and passionate loyalty to him.

In hate, in illusion, and in the perversion of good, evil grows and multiplies to holocaust proportions in the novels, concluding in storms, fighting, murder, in every destruction of men and of nature. Yet it should also be noted that the characters who are damned damn themselves, and that while the damnations are quite theatrical, to say the least, Williams has been very careful to "let the punishment fit the crime."

If there is an Antichrist figure in the novels, it is Simon the Clerk. Williams gives his conception of Antichrist in an essay entitled "Antichrist and the City":

There have, after all, been very few tolerable images of Antichrist, for there are many difficulties in creating one. Antichrist must not be mad ... He must not, even be too romantic. Art cannot bear that ... Antichrist 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. Most images of evil are without that sterility. A passion for destruction, Black Masses, and so on, palpitate with real (even if disgusting) life ... Antichrist cannot be
funny, but neither can he have a serious purpose except himself. He also says that it is very satisfactory for the Antichrist figure to be a Christian and that there is one element "in which nothing but Antichrist can be Christlike, in the consciousness of a kind of otherness from men."

The Clerk, although he is a Jew, fulfills most of these qualifications, yet he does not really emerge as an Antichrist figure. Despite the excellent passages describing his thoughts and his background, there is too much of the black-cloaked magician about him even before his disintegration into just that at the end of the novel. Perhaps Williams was attempting to depict the destruction of an Antichrist figure as Antichrist in the same way he earlier depicted the destruction of lesser human beings as human beings. The Clerk has too much of the caricature about him. This was not true of Considine, the most insidiously evil of all of the adversaries, but Considine is far too vital and too romantic to fit Williams' description of Antichrist.

Stylistically, Williams' depiction of evil throughout the novels is uneven; at its best it is chilling and powerful; at its worst it is so surrounded by occult happenings that one loses track of the essential evil. But there is nothing uneven about its depiction from a theological standpoint. Williams is following the traditional Christian conception of evil explained through the goodness of God and the Fall of Man.

CHAPTER IV

COINHERENCE, THE CITY, SUBSTITUTION AND EXCHANGE

Underlying all of Williams' later work and implicit in the earlier novels, although it was not until the mid-Thirties that he clarified the ideas in writing, are his doctrines of coinherence, of the City, and of substitution and exchange. At the core of these doctrines are the Christian beliefs that all men are children of God and therefore in union with each other; that the Kingdom of God, or apocalyptically the City, is the state to which Christianity is called, the state which it is to become ("the glory of God in the redeemed and universal union—call it Man or the Church or the City"); and that men are to bear one another's burdens. Williams proceeds to follow these beliefs to their fullest ramifications—or what he considers to be their fullest ramifications.

Coinherence, for example, cannot be used interchangeably with the World Council of Churches or integration or the world community or the idea of such lines as Donne's "No man is an island." Williams means something far more powerful. He means that somehow the unity of mankind is the reflection of the divine coinherence, the way in which the three Persons of the Trinity coinhere in each other; men inherit all of life with each other. It is the

59 Williams, Des. of Dove, p. 15.
"in-Godding" e. g. God on the divine level, and the "in-ethering" of man on the human level. No other artist seems so passionately explicit in his imaginative revelation of the belief that men are not only part of each other but that this "in-ethering" is a web of living, accepting, and forgiving; that it is action as well as belief, being as well as becoming; that there is constant movement—God to man, man to man, man to God; that while damnation may well become, by one's own choice, one's own business, one's salvation is the business of all.

The City, the union of men in coinherence, which is not yet wholly present and which is always in a state of becoming and toward which men should strive, is defined, says Williams, in the last section of the Apostles' Creed:

"I believe in the Holy Ghost" is its first clause and prirnal condition. If it is living, it lives so, and only so, towards Christ, in whom it already lives complete, having (by virtue of His substitution) "the perfect and simultaneous possession of everlasting life." Simultaneously, all its citizens derive from all. "The Holy Catholic Church" is its name here, allowing for all proper implications of whatever kind: "visible-invisible," "invincible ignorance," and so on.

The four qualities of the life of the City are the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting:

They are the qualities of the renewed perfection of union—interchange, interchange redeeming even the denial of itself, the glory of the holy flesh by which so much was known, the infinite power in all the glory. The glory is the thing happening; it is not ... an accident of the thing happening. The glory of God is in facts ... there is no fact which is not in His glory. This is the great inclusion which makes the City.

60 Charles Williams, The Figure of Beatrice (New York, 1961), p. 92.

61 Williams, Image of City, p. 110.
No one is exempt from this web of loving; even the evil in the City must somehow be redeemed with the good. Man does not choose from which other men will come the aid necessary for his salvation:

If the web of humanity is in any sense one, if the City exists in our blood as well as in our desires, then we precisely must live from, and be nourished by, those whom we most wholly dislike and disapprove. Even the Church, forgetting that sacred title given to Mary, anthropotokos, has too often spoken as if it existed by its own separate life. So, no doubt, sacramentally and supernaturally, it does; but so, by the very bones and blood of its natural members, it very much does not ... Terrible humility! we derive from those we denounce; "though they slay me, yet will I trust in them."62

The unexclusive life of the City, Williams reasons, is everywhere vicarious. The necessity of bearing one another's burdens pervades this life. In the perfect exchange of the City, men live both from and for each other.

"The methods of exchange [of salvation], of carrying burdens and of giving up burdens to be carried, of acting in the strength of others, of making commitments by others" are the methods by which the City lives. "The principle of the priesthood after its kind, and the principle of marriage after its kind."63

The union of the City exists because "the Holy Ghost moves us to be, by every means to which we are called, the images of Christ, the types of that Original, in or out of the flesh. It is the intercourse of these free images which is the union of the City."64

This is the background of the Williams' novels; this is the City in which

62Ibid., p. 113.
63Ibid., p. 107.
64Ibid., p. 103.
the events take place. It is a City redeemed by Christ, in the way all flesh
was redeemed by Christ, as the Athanasian Creed says, "not by the conversion
of the Godhead into flesh, but by the taking of the manhood into God," in the
greatest exchange of all. And as the redemption is not limited to Christianity
in the limited sense in which the term is usually used, so Williams does not
feel constrained to couch the novels in Christian terminology. The City is not
just the City of the Grail, but the City of the Tarots, and of the Platonic
images, of the Stone of Desire. In a sense he has attempted to absorb these
mythologies or symbols into the all-embracing City. He does not translate
these mythologies into Christian terms because he is trying to expand the
Christian frame of reference rather than to constrict the myths.

Over and in all of the novels moves the Holy Ghost by Its own method of
exchange. And man is the sacramental channel of grace or even of salvation
for other men in the City. As stated in the creedal definition, the life of
the City is in the communion of saints, or the exchange of glory among and
between this life and that other life—by whatever name it is called—which
consists in forgiving, sharing, loving. The Descent of the Dove, Williams
uses phrases from the early Christian Church to illustrate the communion or ex-
change among the worlds: the martyr Felicitas, "Another [dies] for me and I
for him"; the doctor Clement, "He demands of us our lives for the sake of
each other"; the hermit Anthony, "your life and your death are with your
neighbor." The Roman Catholic dogma of the treasury of merits is used as an
illustration of an attempt to doctrinize this idea of the exchange between
the worlds.
Williams was aware that in all modes of life there is substitution and exchange, the surrendering and taking on of burdens to and from others. He says that in the natural life the conception of a child is the primary example of substitution and exchange between parents; in the supernatural life, the task of the godparents is another illustration. In art, in labor, in government, in all areas, men are nourished by the work or by the ideas of other men and give their own work or ideas back. All religions have taught a general sympathy for other men and the duty (or desire) to help others. Substitution and exchange exist instinctively in the most intensive state of natural love, wife for husband, friend for friend, and at the highest point of religious vision, the prayers and sacrifice of religious orders.

But Williams is also calling for something further. He is urging a conscious "compact of substitution" between two men, or conceivably between groups of men by "bearing one another's burdens interiorly as well as exteriorly, by the turning of the general sympathy into something of immediate use." He states explicitly, "Compacts can be made for the taking over of the suffering or troubles, and worries, and distresses, as simply and as effectually as an assent is given to the carrying of a parcel. A man can cease to worry about X because his friend has agreed to be worried by X. No doubt this is a part of casting all our burdens upon the Lord; the point is that it may well be a part of it."

The same idea is reiterated and clarified in a chapter ("The Practice of

---

Substituted Love") in *He Came Down from Heaven*:

To take over the grief or the fear or the anxiety of another is precisely that (to fulfill the law of Christ), and precisely that is less practiced than praised. "Mystical substitution" we have heard from the textbooks... it is supposed to be for "nuns, confessors, saints, not us"; so much the worse for us. We are supposed to be content to "cast our burdens on the Lord." The Lord has indicated that the best way to do so is to hand them to someone else... This technique needs practice and intelligence, as much intelligence as is needed for any other business contract... And such agreement has three points: (I) to know the burden; (II) to give up the burden; (III) to take up the burden.66

The conscious "compact of substitution" is stated as clearly in *Descent into Hell* as in any of the non-fiction. *Descent into Hell* is the novel of substitution and exchange of all kinds. It is Williams' sharpest transfer of one of his ideas into fiction form. Peter Stanhope is here offering to take over Pauline's fear of her doppelganger, or image of herself, whom she keeps meeting:

"Listen—when you go from here, when you are alone, when you think you'll be afraid, let me put myself in your place, and be afraid instead of you... It's so easy, easy for both of us. It needs only the act. For what can be simpler than for you to think to yourself that since I am there to be troubled instead of you, therefore you needn't be troubled; And what can be easier for me than to carry a little while a burden that isn't mine? Haven't you heard it said that we ought to bear one another's burdens?"

"But that means—" she began.

"I know it means listening sympathetically, and thinking unselfishly, and being anxious about, and so on. Well, I don't say a word against all that; no doubt it helps. But I think that when Christ, or St. Paul, or whoever said bear, or whatever he Aramaically said instead of bear, he meant something much more like carrying a parcel instead of someone else. To bear a burden is precisely to carry it instead of..."

"... Would I push my burden on to anyone else?"

"Not if you insist on making a universe for yourself," he answered "If you want to disobey and refuse the laws that are common to us all;

66 Williams, *He Came Down*, p. 88.
if you want to live in pride and derision and anger, you can. But if you will be part of the rest of us, and live and laugh and be ashamed with us, then you must be content to be helped. You must give your burden up, and you must carry someone else’s burdens. I haven’t made the universe and it isn’t my fault. But I’m sure that this is a law of the universe, and not to give up your parcel is as much to rebel as not to carry another’s. You’ll find it quite easy if you let yourself do it.”

So Pauline surrenders her fear to Stanhope while she accepts the fear which her martyred ancestor had of burning, not knowing quite what she is doing until her offer to take the martyr’s burden is accepted:

Her debt was paid and now only she might know why and when she had incurred it. The sacrifice had been accepted. His voice was shouting in her ears as Foxe had said he had shouted, To him that hath shall be given. He had had; she had given to him. She had lived without joy that he might die in joy, but when she lived s’ had now known and when she offered, she had not guessed that the sacrificial victim had died before the sacrificial act was accomplished; that now the act was for resurrection in death.

Here, then, is substitution and exchange between the living and the living and between the living and the dead. This is the common life of the City and one must live in the City or die forever. When Margaret Anstruther, in the same novel, sends out the forces of love and compassion to the ghost of the suicide, she is accepting his death into the City, and he, therefore, becomes aware of the unity of the City. This awareness is not his redemption, but it is the first step toward it. (Williams posits the way of salvation as extending even past death.)

The earlier novels are concerned with the coinherence of the instinctive type. The right order of the universe and of life, mentioned previously, is

67 Williams, Des. into Hell, pp. 133-34.
68 Ibid., p. 236.
coherence, and Mornington, in *War in Heaven*, dies for that. It is also for that right order that Chloe dies and Lord Argyll lives in *Many Dimensions*.

By the time *The Place of the Lion* was published, Williams had moved into a consideration of instinctive coherence, of substitution and exchange, among friends and lovers. Anthony Durant instinctively pits himself against the powers to save his fiancé, Demaris, although he is under no delusions about her personality: "You are the Night of Repose and the Day of Illumination. You are incidentally a night with a good deal of rain and a day with a nasty cold wind. But that may be merely Allah's little game." Demaris, for her part, deliberately exposes herself to danger to save Anthony's friend Quentin, whom she does not really care about, precisely because Quentin is her lover's friend.

Nancy, in *The Greater Trumps*, agrees to enter into the work of controlling the Tarots with her fiancé Henry, not because she is in the least interested in discovering her future (Henry's only explanation to her in the early stages of the work), but because she loves Henry: "She was Henry's will; she was her own will to accomplish that will." Roger's wife Isabel, in *Shadows of Ecstasy*, is the epitome of instinctive substitution and exchange. She has urged him to follow Considine even though it could mean the end of their married life, and when Roger returns defeated, she is as stricken as he:

He had perhaps never trusted her before, for all their sweet friendship. But his defenses were down, and he lay exposed, terribly sensitive to her looks and words. She never sympathized nor condoled; in the deep prac-

---

69 Williams, *Lion*, p. 45.

70 Williams, *Trumps*, p. 88.
lice of her love her heart was struck equally with his. She suffered his desolation as she had his desire; the burst of his spiritual necessity with which she had charged herself knew this union also. He realized that moment the vast experience with love which she had undergone, and accepted it.71

The doctrine of substitution and exchange and forgiveness in the last novel, All Hallow's Eve, is raised to the most intense level, as are all the states of being and becoming which exist in the newly-dead Lester. Lester has wronged Betty in life, through petty schoolgirl wrongs but wrongs nonetheless. She seeks Betty's forgiveness, knowing but dimly that her own inclusion in the City depends on it. Here is the other side of the Stanhope-Pauline exchange. Stanhope offered Pauline help. Lester must ask for Betty's help, and to ask is harder than to offer. Betty must recall all of Lester's unkindnesses truly and yet forgive them. Betty does not want to remember; she is happier having forgotten. But Lester has asked for this specific help, so Betty remembers—and forgives. Neither knows that herein is part of Lester's salvation accomplished. Then Lester in turn puts herself in Betty's place and takes the curse of the Clerk who is seeking to separate Betty's soul and body. As the dissolution begins, Lester feels her body supported by two pieces of wood, although she does not realize it is a cross: "She pressed herself against that sole support. So those greater than she had come—saints, martyrs, confessors—but they joyously, knowing that this was the first movement of their reedification in the City, and that thus in that earliest world fashioned of their earthly

71 Williams, Shadows, p. 253.
fantasies began the raising of the true houses and streets. Neither her mind nor her morals had prepared her for this discovery, nor did she in the least guess what was happening." The Clerk has been using the reversed Tetragrammaton to cast the spell; Betty murmurs, if not the name of God, then a manifestation of it, and the spell is broken. "Lester had taken the shock of the curse—no less willingly or truly that she had not known what she was doing. She had suffered instead of Betty, as Betty had once suffered for her; but the endurance had been short and the restoration soon, so quickly had the Name which is the City sprung to the rescue of its own." Lester from the moment of her death has been able to begin the move toward redemption because of the love that existed between herself and Richard, and they too exchange forgiveness.

If Descent into Hell is the novel of substitution and exchange, All Hallows' Eve is the novel of the City. The imagery of the City is everywhere, images of actual London mingled with those of the City in which Lester moves. The novel is full of Christian symbols of baptism, the Cross, the Holy Name, water and wine, blood, and the hallows, although the only acknowledged Christian in the story is Jonathan. Hadfield says, "In the climax of the last chapter neither Christ nor a Church is named, but there is the Ascension, the blood, grace, and the Hallows." That Betty and Richard dwell in one aspect of the City and Lester in another, in the noli me tangere of the newly dead,

---

72 Williams, All Hallows, p. 159.
73 Ibid., p. 164.
74 Hadfield, p. 190.
is of no consequence. The coinherence of the City is in all and open to all. The chapters entitled "Wise Water" and "The Magical Sacrifice" contain Williams' greatest imaginative treatment of coinherence, the City, and substitution and exchange.

One more point in relation to coinherence should be mentioned, not because it bears any direct impact on criticism of the novels, but because it confirms Williams' complete commitment to the doctrine of coinherence. He suggested in a postscript to The Descent of the Dove that a Company of Coinherence come into existence. He wrote of such a Company in The Region of the Summer Stars. "This Order of the Coinherence would exist only for that, to mediate and practise [coinhere] it." It was to have no organisation; it was to be grounded in the Christian Church. It was to be simply an awareness of coinherence among persons who wanted to express it in their own lives or meditations. Hadfield explains, "The life of exchange has four feast days: Trinity Sunday as its origin, its pattern and its end; the Annunciation as our consent to the birth of love in our human life; the Transfiguration as the aim and duty of our capacities in loving; and All Saints' Day as witnessing our coinherence with all others on the way at all times." Williams suggested that such feast days begin with the Eucharist. Since coinherence is non-exclusive he would go no farther in founding any kind of visible order. Yet some sort of tangible Company does seem to have come into being since Hadfield

75 Williams, Des. of Dove, p. 236.
76 Hadfield, p. 162.
also says that at the end of his life "The growth of the Order continued to amaze him." There is no way of knowing how many people were influenced in this direction by Williams' work or if such a Company still exists, a fortunate lack since Williams would have considered such commitment, while certainly not a private affair—the nature of cohesion being what he believed it to be—at least a matter of relationships to others and not a matter of statistics or of the cult color which certainly would accompany any such disclosures.

---


CHAPTER V

THE AFFIRMATION OF IMAGES

Coinherence for most people is a direct relationship with others; for some the relationship partakes primarily of the mystical with substitution and exchange occurring on an almost impersonal level. For example, Stanhope and Pauline have an actual flesh and blood relationship; they see each other and talk with each other. Their hands touch. But since Margaret Anstruther has virtually withdrawn from the world, her coinherence with the suicide is on a much different level. It is not impersonal, but it transcends the personal; or to state this in another way, Stanhope contemplates the glory of God through all the images of God in the world about him, people, poetry, drama. Margaret contemplates the glory of God by withdrawal from all images and by absorption in the Alone. This absorption allows her to coinhere with all the things of this world although she is no longer really of them.

These two modes of coinherence are, in Williams' terminology, the Way of the Affirmation of Images and the Way of the Negation of Images. They are the way of the man in everyday life and the way of the cloistered contemplative. They have existed in Christianity from the beginning, in religion even before Christianity although Williams would claim that until Messias redeemed the world, the Way of Affirmation could not be valid. The two Ways coinhere.
The Descent of the Dove is, among other things, a tracing of the workings of the two ways in the Church—Constantine balanced by the Desert Fathers, Dante by The Cloud of Unknowing, feastings by fastings. He notes that at the end of the iconoclast heresy in ninth-century Byzantium, the Church, in restoring the images, committed herself to the position that "the actual affirmation of these images was good and just. Men must use their piety and intelligence to avoid idolatry; they could not and must not be saved by the Rejection of Images except as their private vocations might dictate. But private vocations are not to lay down the law in Christendom; images—one may add, living images also—were to receive 'proskunesis,' particular honour."

Throughout all of his writing, fiction and non-fiction, Williams quoted the phrase of an early Christian mystic "This also is Thou; neither is this Thou," to show the union of the two ways. This statement might be paraphrased, "Yes, this person (or book or drink or almost anything else) is God; all things are capable of being known as images of God. But no, of course this is not God; God is beyond all images and even beyond all understanding." Both statements are true, and neither can exist without the other:

Both methods, the Affirmative Way and the Negative Way, were to co-exist, one might almost say, to co-inhere, since each was to be the key of the other, in intellect as in emotion, in morals as in doctrine ... No Affirmation could be so complete as not to need definition, discipline, and refusal; no Rejection so absolute as not to have necessary (literally and metaphysically) beans and a wild beast's skin and a little water. Those who most rejected material things must cling the more closely to verbal formulae; those who looked most askance at the formulae might apprehend most easily the divine imagery of matter ... The one way was to

79 Williams, Des. of Dove, p. 95.
affirm all things orderly until the universe throbbed with vitality; the other to reject all things until there was nothing anywhere but He. The Way of Affirmation was to develop great art and romantic love and marriage and philosophy and social justice. The Way of Rejection was to break out continually in the profound mystical documents of the soul, the records of the great psychological masters of Christendom. All was involved in Christendom.

But Williams also believed, as Heath-Stubbs comments, that in "historic Christian tradition (at least in the West) the emphasis has tended to be on the Negative Way, rather than on its complement, the Way of Affirmation. This may possibly be due to the influence of monastic ideas, in the Middle Ages and after." Williams himself noted wryly of the image of romantic love, "It is one of the drawbacks of a celibate priesthood that they are bound to the personal rejection of that particular image." But he also knew that the Way of Affirmation is more treacherous; the distractions from and the perversions of it are endless. "Rejection," he wrote, "is a silver key, which is 'more dear.' Affirmation is a golden key, more difficult to use."

Nevertheless, he set out to develop a sort of theology of the Way of the Affirmation of Images. It finds its greatest expression in his theology of romantic love, the actual romantic and sexual dimensions of which will be discussed more fully in Chapter VI. His Way of Affirmation is based on the redemption of matter as seen (and quoted previously in this paper) in the Athanasian Creed: "For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one

80 Ibid., pp. 57-8.
81 Heath-Stubbs, p. 16.
82 Williams, Deus of Dove, p. 139.
83 Williams, The Figure of Beatrice, p. 157.
Christ. One, not by the conversion of the Godhood into flesh, but by taking
of the manhood into God." All matter, then, images God in some way, and all
matter is therefore capable of being accepted by men for the sake of their
own personal redemption.

Now, says Williams, within theordinariness of everyday life (and much
of it is repetition and sameness) exist "pre-eminent and renovating moments."
They exist at all times and under all philosophies. "These moments are often
interpreted in terms of the then dominant philosophy, but they retain their
richness, and (at least for a while) they enrich the philosophy. An exchange
takes place between ideas and events, and that exchange is communicated to all
men, first to the more creative and afterwards to all minds." The funda-
mental theme of the metaphysical philosophy of Christendom is salvation and as
it became defined, Williams says, "experience underwent new interpretation."
Saints were added to the naturally outstanding figures of kings, law-givers,
conquerors, and poets. "The idea of social justice became important. The idea
of tragedy lost its importance—almost its nature. In this world, all was,
in the end, under Providence ... Immortality was now a fact ... All these al-
terations (in philosophy) filled men's pre-eminent moments with new nourishment
and new repair. The imagination of the world and of heaven changed."

The alteration in the relations of the sexes (although not exclusively
the sexual relations), under this change was probably the most important for

---

84 Williams, He Came Down, p. 62.
85 Ibid., pp. 63-4.
"the casual fancies and ordinary outlook of men and women." (See Chapter VI) But other pre-eminent moments of great art, politics, nature, maturity, have the same richness and vitality and are caught within the philosophy of salvation.

Thus the Williams novels are crowded with images and symbols that mark the relationship of the Image with the Imaged. The novels teem with "the intensity of the pre-eminent moment." The Affirmation of Images throbs through them all; indeed, to Williams, the very words in which the novels are written are images of the Way portrayed. Yet in almost all of the novels the Way of Affirmation is balanced by one character who represents the Way of the Negation of Images, and there is shown an exchange of courtesy between the followers of each Way or a mutual acknowledgment that each depends upon the other. One of Williams' favorite examples of the courtesy between the Ways is found in the Arthurian legend (Mallory's) when Galahad requests, "Salute me to my lord, Sir Launcelot." Here the Way of Negation salutes the Way of Affirmation.

The novels' most intensely mystical character, or the one most withdrawn from the images, is Richardson in The Place of the Lion. Drawn completely by the "Behold, I come quickly" of the Unicorn, Richardson has been pursuing the Way of Rejection quietly and slowly until the breakthrough of the powers forces all of the characters faster and faster to their final commitment. He meets Anthony for a last time before vanishing toward the phoenix-fire of the adept's house:

---

86 Ibid., p. 64.
"I'm sorry," he [Anthony] said. "I'd hoped we might have talked more ... I can't see but what images have their place. Ex umbria perhaps, but the moon has to drive the shadows away naturally, hasn't it?"

The other shrugged. "O, I know," he said. "It's been argued a hundred times, Jansenist and Jesuit, the monk and the married man, mystic and sacramentalist. But all I know is that I must make for the end when and as soon as I see it. Perhaps that's why I am alone."^37

Anthony makes another comment on the Ways of Affirmation and Rejection.

This time he is thinking of his friend Quentin, or the image of friendship:

Much was possible to a man in solitude; perhaps the final transmutations and achievements in the zones of the yonder side of the central knowledge were possible only to the spirit in solitude. But some things were possible only to a man in companionship, and of these the most important was balance. No mind was so good that it did not need another mind to counter and equal it and to save it from conceit and blindness and bigotry and folly. Only in such balance could humility be found ...^38

The Archdeacon in War in Heaven represents the Negative Way in contrast to the Duke and Mornington. His private bedroom is a monastic cell. In his relationship to the Grail:

The Archdeacon found no such help in the remembrance of kings or poets ...

"Neither is this Thou," he breathed, and answered, "Yet, this also is Thou." [Note here the reversal of the phrases from the way this statement is usually quoted by Williams.] He considered, in this, the chalice offered at every altar, and was again aware of a general movement of all things toward a narrow channel ... He had never dreamed of the heavenly courts attending Christ upon the altar ... desire of the Church expressed in the ritual of the Church the Sacred elements seemed to him to open upon the Divine Nature, upon Bethlehem and Calvary and Olivet, as that itself opened upon the Centre of all ... his mind knew no other vision than that of a thousand dutifully celebrated Mysteries in his priestly life; so and not otherwise all things return to God ...^39

In The Greater Trumps Williams has created in Sybil Coningsby a character

87 Williams, Lion, pp. 271-2.
88 Ibid., pp. 260-1.
89 Williams, War in Heaven, pp. 136-7.
similar to Margaret Anstruther. Both represent the Negation of Images, although the aged Margaret is about to leave the world by death while Sybil is still very much in it. Yet both have turned from the images to direct confrontation with the Unknown. To Sybil this results in her enjoying everything because, while all images are good to her eyes, her salvation does not lie in them; she is concerned, but personally uninvolved. "'Aunt Sybil,'" says her nephew, "'would find a torture chamber deliciously lovely as long as she was the one on the rack. Or a broken-down Ford. Or draughts. Or an anaconda.'" When Sybil prays for Nancy, it is in the manner of the mystic:

She emptied her mind of all thought and pictures; she held it empty till the sudden change in it gave her the consciousness of the spreading out of the stronger will within; then she allowed that ... unimportant daily mind to bear the image and memory of Nancy into its presence. She did not, in the ordinary sense, "pray for Nancy"; she did not presume to suggest to Omniscience what it would be a thoroughly good thing if it did. She merely held her own thought of Nancy steady in Omniscience."

The strange, enigmatic figure of Considine in Shadows of Ecstasy is understandable only in terms of Williams' concept of the Way of Affirmation for Considine is the great affirmative theoretician. Eliminate all the theatricals surrounding him—the chanting African tribes, the sense of blood and the threatened destruction of the world, the fact that he has been alive for a couple of centuries—for though these things make for "color" they do not help in understanding Considine. Then consider the ambivalent symbolism that surrounds him—darkness and the Christ references. Consider the reaction of the shallow, smug Rosamund to the African chief Inkamasi, a reaction due to the all-pervading influence of Considine:

---

90 Williams, Trumps, p. 157.
She, she of all people, could never be capable of abominable longing to be near the dark prince of Africa; she couldn’t thrill to the trumpets of conversion nor glow in the fires of ecstasy. Nor could she hate herself for refusing them. But she could and inevitably did hate the things that resembled them—Considine’s person and Roger’s verse and Phillip her fiancé, all of Phillip, for Phillip to her agonized sense was at once a detestable parody of what she wanted and a present reminder of what she wanted to forget ... Power was in her and she was terrified of it. She had been self-possessed, but all herself was in the possessing and nothing in the possessed, self-controlled but she had only a void to control. But now that nothing and that void were moved with fire and darkness, the shadow of ecstasy lay over her life, and denial the possibility of ecstasy she fled through its shadow as far as the edge, and halted irresolute, and was drawn back by a fascination she loved and hated.  

She betrays Considine to the police that night. What has been released in her is, of course, sexual desire, but Williams is not saying that sexual desire should not be released—in certain spheres. Consider that Roger follows Considine because he understands the power of poetry and that at the end of the novel Roger, the most urbane and intelligent of all of the heroes, would still be committed to Considine if somehow he could return. Consider Inkamasi’s commitment to Considine because Considine releases kingship in him. These are the images of love, of poetry, of kingship.

Considine calls to those:

"Who know that their lives have origin and nourishment in the great moments of exalted imagination ... to all who owe their devotion to music, to poetry, to painting and sculpture, to the servants of every more than rational energy ... to all who at this present moment exist in the exchanged or unexchanged adoration of love ... There, perhaps more surely and swiftly than in any other state of being outside the transmuting Way, can the labor of exploration be begun; there is the knowledge, the capacity, the herald apprehension of victory ... Believe, imagine, live. Know exaltation and feed on it; in the strength of such food men shall enter into his kingdom.  

91 Williams, Shadows, p. 157.  
92 Ibid., p. 45.
It is true that Considine shows scorn for the "immortal finalities of the past ... the intellect, the philosophies, the science, the innumerable patterns of Europe." This antagonism would eliminate a great many images from the imaged world, but since Williams himself was primarily concerned with love and poetry, with the "exalted imagination," one cannot believe that he condemns Considine for that scorn, although Williams did not scorn these things.

There is only one interpretation of Considine, the most compelling of the adversaries. He is in the Way of the Affirmation of Images, and he is the great heretic of the Affirmation of Images. Williams' "renewing and pre-eminent moments" and Considine's "exalted imagination" of the moment are one and the same thing. But Considine perverts the Way of Affirmation; he would use the power of these moments not as moments of salvation in themselves but as a means for the eventual conquest of death. The Way of Affirmation, says Williams, "will, sooner or later, involve the affirmation of the images of suffering and loss, along with the others."

"He that masters death has mastered the world, and he that masters death has mastered the other," says Considine. And he is answered by two others, Isabel, who loves her husband yet who would lose him rather than block his search for glory, and Inkamasi, who would die rather than lose his kingship.

93 Ibid., p. 43.
94 Heath-Stubbs, p. 16.
95 Williams, Shadows, p. 1791
Isabel says, "But those that die may be lordlier than you; they are obedient in defeat. Can you live truly till you have been quite defeated?" And Inkamasi asks: "Are you sure that man can conquer till he has been wholly defeated? Are you sure that he can find plentitude till he has known utter despair ... it may be that only in such complete despair he finds that which cannot despair and is something other than man." 'There are many reasons for avoiding the work and all religions have excused man.' Considine replies. But he is mistaken. Christ did indeed suffer defeat, and it is only in the light of the salvation that came out of this defeat that the Way of the Affirmation of Images has any validity. And it is only in the light of his heresy of the Way of Affirmation of Images that Considine has any clear-cut meaning.

---

96 Ibid., p. 152.
CHAPTER VI

THE THEOLOGY OF ROMANTIC LOVE

"Believe, imagine, live," called Considine, and he called especially to those in love, for it is in the state of being "in love" that the moves toward salvation—or away from it—can come most quickly.

Williams spent his entire life mulling over the implications and interaction of love and salvation. His considerations of these began with the early poems; they are one of the central themes of the last novel. He was a romantic theologian, says C. S. Lewis:

A romantic theologian does not mean one who is romantic about theology, but one who is theological about romance, and who considers the theological implications of those experiences which are called "romantic." The belief that the most serious and ecstatic experiences either of human love or of imaginative literature have such theological implications, and that they can be healthy and fruitful only if the implications are diligently thought out and severely lived, is the root principle of all his work.

The sacramental aspect of the Way of Affirmation of Images is probably most apparent in Williams' ideas on romantic love. Just as in the Church-ordained sacraments another person, i.e., the priest or minister or the other person in the sacrament of marriage, serves as a channel of grace or new life, so in the theology of romantic love the two persons serve as the channels of grace or new life for each other. This is especially apparent when the lovers

---

98Lewis, Essays Presented to Charles Williams, p. vi.
are acting in a consciously Christian philosophical milieu, where the idea of salvation has permeated their relationship. Williams found his greatest exposition of romantic love in the poem of Dante and Beatrice; he wrote his own most thorough exposition of it in The Figure of Beatrice.

"It is a process according to the Affirmative Way. It begins when a boy and girl meet in the streets of Florence; it ends when the whole web of interchanging creation pour themselves toward the Deivirilis (to borrow a word from the Aeropagite) within the point of Godhead ... His [Dante's] brain tells him in a flash: 'Now your beatitude has appeared to you.' All the rest of his work contained and examined that fact, however wide its scope."

The Paradiso, Williams says, is, in addition to being an image of the redeemed universe, "an image of the redeemed way ... an image of a redeemed love-affair ... of an ordinary love affair, if things went as they ought to go."

The theology of romantic love is about the redemption of any ordinary love affair between any ordinary boy and girl, and the redemption which occurs precisely because they are in love. The redemption is possible because all images, including those of lovers and of love itself, have been redeemed. Williams also insists, though, that love "must have something of the 'otherness' and terror of God."

99 Williams, Des. of Love, p. 132.

100 Williams, The Figure of Beatrice, p. 192.

101 Williams, No Come Down, p. 15.
"When the lover sees the beloved in light, when he or she (in the proper sense) adores, when (is it to say too much?) some sense of the eternal identity of that other is flashed on him or on her—this is the beginning of many an ordinary love affair."

Williams sees no dichotomy between physical and spiritual love, although he does not confine physical love to the sex act alone. "The operations of matter are a means of the operation of Christ, and the body has not, in fact, as some pious people suggest, fallen a good deal farther than the soul."

To Williams the body is the "gay and lordly body." He will not have it subordinated to the soul; the body is controlled, certainly, just as the soul is in some way controlled by the body through the fact of being housed in it, but the body is not subordinated. The soul and body share the general coherency of the universe. Heath-Stubbs is not so much mistaken as using meaningless terminology when he says that to Williams, "The aim of the Way is not the exaltation of Eros to a transcendent plane, but the transformation into Agape—Christian love within the framework of Christian marriage." To the Williams lover in the throes of salvation, eros and agape are one and the same thing. Beaumont says as much: "... eros and agape are really one. Eros does not become agape, as in the great plays of Claudel. Eros is agape." However, he then falls into Heath-Stubbs' error by adding, "Indeed, eros transcends agape;
it opens the way to divine power itself, which is made manifest through the
transfigured lovers." Eros does not transcend agape, which most certainly
could also open the way to divine power. One side of a coin, one section of a
circle, cannot transcend the other, and Williams himself writes, "By virtue of
the Incarnation Eros and Agape are no longer divided though they may be again in
the next moment." So they may be, but it is not Williams' intention to
have eros leading to agape or vice-versa. Either thing can happen and un-
doubtedly does at different times in love, but the central point of the theo-
logy of romantic love is that eros and agape coinhere.

This is most apparent in the novels in All Hallows' Eve, for when the
curse of the Clerk, the "pale nothingness" of the anti-Tetragrammaton, reaches
the area of Lester's thighs and "that in her which her fastidious pride had kept secluded from all but Richard," the curse is suddenly broken. The
image of eros, the physical ties between her and Richard, is not touched.
She is dead, but even here as she rests against the invisible cross, eros is
not denied or subordinated.

There is one other concept of eros in the Williams' books which cannot be overlooked. This is his use of the idea: "My Eros is crucified." This idea refers not so much to the theology of romantic love as to coinherence, yet
because all of these ideas are bound together, it too is primarily traceable

106 Williams, Image of City, p. 161.
107 Williams, All Hallows, p. 160.
in the lovers of the novels. Williams calls this sentence, "My Eros is crucified," the greatest epigram of all:

Ignatius of Antioch in the early second century had tossed it out on his way to martyrdom: "My Eros is crucified." Learned men have disputed on the exact meaning of the word: can it refer, with its intensity of allusion to physical passion, to Christ? or does it rather refer to his own physical nature. We, who have too much separated our physical nature from Christ's, cannot easily read an identity into the two meanings. But they unite and others spring from them: "My love is crucified"; "My love for my Love is crucified"; "My Love in my love is crucified." The physical and the spiritual are no longer divided; he who is Theos is Anthropos, and all images of anthropos are in him. The Eros that is crucified lives again and the Eros lives after a new style ... the great romantic vision approached.

The "Eros crucified" theme is the correlative to the "utter defeat" of the Way of Affirmation which Considine would not accept. Translated into the theology of specifically romantic love, it must mean the destruction or death of one of the lovers, as Beatrice in the Dante study and Lester in All Hallows' Eve, or of the defeat of the love passion itself as Nancy's love for Henry is defeated momentarily in The Greater Trumps.

There are numerous occasions throughout the novels where the lovers suffer, their sufferings caused by each other. Suffering is a part of romantic love just as it is a part of the greater Affirmation of Images. Wentworth falls in Descent into Hell because he denies reality, and a great deal of this reality is bound up in Adela, for whom he feels passion. It is just as important to see the beloved truly as it is to see anything else in life truly. Anthony, in The Place of the Lion, suffers not only because he is struggling with the fate of the world, but also because of the break between his fiance

108Williams, Des. of Dove, p. 46.
and his best friend. "Those whom he loved were at war. He loved her and she had persecuted his friend! But he loved them both, and there was no taking of sides. Love itself never could take sides." Anthony remains firm in his devotion to both Damaris and Quentin, and, aside from the ordinary human complications of pride, selfishness, stupidity, the love between him and Damaris holds fast.

In The Greater Trumps Nancy tastes momentarily the death of love itself. Like Anthony she is caught in a conflict between her lover and someone else she loves—her father. This conflict is much more serious since Henry is trying to kill her father, yet after the first shock of this knowledge has passed, she is able to cry to Henry, "'I never loved you more, yet I never loved you less.'" She sees her love defeated; the plans for her entire future life (and she is a romantic girl) fall apart before her. Her love for Henry is crucified through Henry, yet she is able to continue loving, although not in precisely the same way, for the knowledge of betrayal and the defeat of love are now encompassed in her loving. That the triumph of Nancy's love somehow fails to light a responsive spark in the reader is due to Williams' poor "depth perception" of the personalities of the lovers in the novel. The ingredients of romantic love and of "Eros crucified" are there.

On the other hand, Isabel in Shadows of Ecstasy is a strong portrait of a woman in the Way of Romantic Love, and although her love for Roger never reaches the actual point of crucifixion, she lives, for a period of time, in

109 Williams, Lion, p. 143.
110 Williams, Trumps, p. 104.
the belief that it will. She not only allows him to leave her and to follow Considine; she actively encourages him although she knows his departure may in some way end their love. "We only live on what you give us imaginatively, I mean. You have to find the great powers," she says to Roger. When Sir Bernard asks if she wanted Roger to go, she replies, "I want it—whatever he wants. I don't want it unselfishly, or so that he may be happy, or because I ought to, or for any reason at all. I just want it. And then, since I haven't myself to think of, I'm really not divided or disturbed in wanting, so I can save him some trouble ... It's the way things happen if you love someone ... I couldn't want it because of him. No—somehow he wanted it in me." And when Sir Bernard asks if this makes her happy, Isabel replies, "Oh, of course it's dreadfully painful, but—yes, utterly."

Later in the same conversation she cries, "Oh, every fiber of me's aching for him and I could sing for joy all through me. Isn't that all the ecstasy I could bear! Come, and let's do something before it breaks my heart to be alive." She and Roger have achieved a relationship of love in marriage that Williams presents as the ideal. It is not only unselfish, it is almost unselfconscious. She must suffer because he must follow Considine, but he must go as much for her as for himself. He has seen the vision of God (although the novel does not use the term) in her and in poetry, in the best traditions of romantic love,

111Williams, Shadows, p. 145.
112Ibid., p. 189.
113Ibid., p. 191.
and he must follow that vision. And she, knowing also the vision and that in
Considerine it is false, grieves and glories in his going.

Phillip in the same novel is also heir to the romantic vision although
the lover Rosamund through whom he glimpses it is presented with such an un-
pleasant personality that it is difficult to credit her as his "beatitude."
The passage concluding, "Over that white curve of her arm he looked into
incredible space; abysses of intelligence lay beyond it," 114 is a masterful
example of the vision arising from the sight of a purely physical portion of
the beloved. Williams is quite correct, according to his theology, in giving
Phillip this vision through Rosamund, since the theology of romantic love does
not demand that the beloved be pleasing or beautiful or agreeable but only be-
loved. Artistically speaking, however, it would seem that this vision should
have been ascribed to Roger through Isabel.

With Lester in All Hallow's Eve, Williams brought eros into a novel in
the most definitive way, representing almost purely sexual love. That there
was a great deal of physical passion between Isabel and Roger is implicit. The
Greater Trumps mentions Nancy's physical passion for Henry although it does not
elaborate on it. But in the last novel the physical passion that existed be-
tween Richard and Lester while she still lived is the predominant fact of their
relationship. She remembers him in physical terms—the sound of his footsteps,
his hands, the glass of water he brought her one night in bed. It is because
she has loved Richard that she is predisposed to love Betty, and she has loved

114 Ibid., p. 62.
Richard as much, if not more, with her body as with her spirit. The seeds of her salvation lie in her physical passion. And this passion is never denied; even though she is dead, it still exists. After Lester has taken the curse in place of Bett, Richard enters the room:

Lester saw him. She felt, as he came, all her old self lifting in her; bodiless she seemed to recall her body in the joy they exchanged. He saw her smile, and in the smile heaven was frank and she was shy ... she said, "I'll wait for you a million years." She felt a stir within her, as if life quickened, and she remembered with new joy that the deathly tide had never reached, even in appearance, to the physical house of life. If Richard or she went now, it would not much matter; their fulfillment was irrevocably promised them, in what manner so-ever they knew or were to know it. 115

When she and Richard see each other for the last time, her parting words to him are, "Goodbye, my blessing." It is the same manner as Dante's "my beatitude" in reference to Beatrice. In Lester, eros has been crucified; its crucifixion begins for her at the moment of death but is not completed until the saving of Betty and the final leavetaking. Yet there is no indication that eros has ended. In death it is still eros; bodiless, Lester rejoices in her body.

Herein is the third characteristic of life in the City—"resurrection of the body," and not of the body only, but of all things the body has done.

The fourth characteristic of the City is "life everlasting." Charles Williams wrote of nothing else.

115 Williams, All Hallow. p. 169.
116 Ibid., p. 269.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Primary Sources

A. The Novels


2. ———. Descent into Hell. London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1937.


B. Other Works


3. ———. The Figure of Beatrice. New York: Noonday Press, 1961.


II. Secondary Sources


APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Joan Turner Beifuss has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

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

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

Date  
1 June 1963

Signature of Adviser  
[Signature]