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Thomas Huw Mordecai

Charles Williams' understanding of evil and salvation,  
with particular reference to his novels

M. A.

1992

The thesis is divided into three sections:

- 1) An examination of A. E. Waite and his Fellowship of the Rosy Cross, of which Williams was a member for ten years. The symbols used by Waite had a profound effect upon Williams, who continued to employ them throughout his life. However, he rejected the implicit gnosticism of Waite in favour of the rites and doctrines of the Church of England.
- 2) Moberly's *Atonement and Personality* is discussed. His understanding that the Holy Spirit is "the very constituting reality of ourselves", leads to Williams' belief in the inter-relationship of all Christians. To deliberately enter into this relationship ("co-inherence") is salvation; to attempt to retreat into isolation, damnation. The myth of the Fall is discussed, within the theological tradition of " Evil as non-being". With only the good to know, Adam chose to know good "as antagonism"; through the work of Christ what had been seen as evil can be known as good once more.
- 3) Each of Williams' seven novels is analysed in the light of these issues. Waite's continuing influence is identified in Williams' use of occult symbolism. Equally important is the influence of the Anglican liturgy upon Williams' imagination. The novels demonstrate his belief in the effectiveness of co-inherence through "compacts of substitution". Because of the Atonement, repentance results in forgiveness and the redemption of the past. The giving and receiving of forgiveness is the foundation of the co-inherent life, in which all things can be known as "occasions for joy".

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Charles Williams' understanding of evil and salvation,  
with particular reference to his novels

Thomas Huw Mordecai

Master of Arts

University of Durham

Department of Theology

1992



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Charles Williams' understanding of evil and salvation,  
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Introduction

Today Charles Williams has become something of a curiosity - a minor literary figure, most frequently found in footnotes rather than the body of a text. Associated towards the end of his life with the notable Oxford group, the Inklings, it is the other members who are the centre of critical interest and acclaim, particularly C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien. Even in publications devoted to this circle, such as the *American Mythlore: A Journal of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams and the Genres of Myth and Fantasy Studies* or the German *Inklings - Jahrbuch für Literatur und Ästhetik*, Williams is much neglected. While Lewis and Tolkien continue to be read and admired, Williams if remembered at all is remembered because he was their friend.

And yet, those who knew him would not have been content to see him in such a minor role. Lewis himself, writing of Williams' Arthurian poems, could declare:

I hope that . . . before I die I may see "Williams scholarship" sweeping my whole chronology away and allotting me my place among the pre-scientific primitives.<sup>1</sup>

John Heath-Stubbs reached the conclusion that:

(his) articulation is that of a major poet<sup>2</sup>.

W. H. Auden often returned to Williams' works:

The more I read *Taliessin Through Logres* and *The Region of Summer Stars*, the more rewarding I find them. . . . I have been reading and rereading *The Descent of the Dove* for some sixteen years now and I find it a source of intellectual delight and spiritual nourishment which remains inexhaustible.<sup>3</sup>

while T. S. Eliot<sup>4</sup> expressed both his enjoyment of, and indebtedness to, Charles Williams.

Not that Williams receives unanimous critical acclaim. Several critics find him obscure and unrewarding, and F. R. Leavis speaks for many when he asserts:

however sound the poet's orthodoxy, he hasn't begun to be a poet.<sup>5</sup>

How, then, should a man be assessed, who can provoke such divergent reactions? Part of the problem lies in the breadth of Williams' work. Apart from his poetry, he also wrote plays, masques, fiction, biographies, popular theology and works of literary criticism, as well as critical introductions to the works of many other writers (most notably to the influential second edition of *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, OUP, 1930). It is outside the scope of this work to examine everything that he wrote, and therefore attention will be focused on his seven novels - published between 1930 and 1945 - although references will be made over the entire corpus. By restricting the field of inquiry in this way, it will be possible to compare similar works, to see what common themes run through them. As such themes emerge, however, it will be natural to see how they are reflected in works belonging to different genres.

In particular, the main thrust of this thesis will be to look at the justification of God which Williams offers, by examining his understanding of the nature of redemption - a task which also calls for an appraisal of his concept of creation and of evil. Such theodicy can be approached from two different angles, summarized by Moltmann:

In the history of religion and philosophy we keep finding two different solutions. (i) *The dualistic conception*. A good principle and an evil principle are in conflict in the world. . . . (ii) *The monistic conception*. Only the good has existence; evil does not, or is that which does not exist.<sup>e</sup>

well to  
the  
divine

Much of the imagery which Williams uses comes from occult traditions, and brings with it the suspicion of dualism. One of the purposes of the thesis will be to argue that Williams' thinking is firmly within the monistic conception.

The course followed will be: first, to examine some of the influences which guided his thinking, in order to put him in context; secondly, to discuss the way in which Williams formulated those ideas that were most peculiarly his own; and finally, to look at each of his novels to see how these ideas were creatively embodied. Is it possible to discern a coherent theological viewpoint within these works of fiction? What understanding of the nature of evil and salvation can be found there?

Footnotes:

1. C. S. Lewis "Williams and the Arthuriad" in *Arthurian Torso*, OUP, 1948, pg. 4.
2. John Heath-Stubbs *Charles Williams* Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1955, pg. 39.
3. W. H. Auden, "Charles Williams: A Review Article", *The Christian Century*, May 2, 1956, pg. 553.
4. T. S. Eliot, Introduction to *All Hallows Eve* Eerdmans (paperback) 1981, pgs. ix-xviii. See also fn. 35, pg. 112, below.
5. F. R. Leavis *The Common Pursuit*, Pelican Books 1978, pg. 252, reprinted from *Scrutiny*, vol. 16, no. 4, (Winter 1949) pgs. 339-44, "The Logic of Christian Discrimination".
6. Jürgen Moltmann, "Theodicy", in *The New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, SCM, 1983, pg. 564.

## 1: Influences on the early thought of Charles Williams

The first impression formed of Charles Williams' novels by many readers, is of supernatural sensationalism. This repels them, and some retain strong feelings of antipathy. Such an impression was reinforced when at least two of the novels were issued in paperback in the mid 1970s, as part of *The Dennis Wheatley Library of the Occult*. One of them, *War in Heaven*, was described on the cover as: "The classic fantasy novel of an occult struggle for the Holy Grail". This would suggest that the novels should be located firmly within the somewhat prurient genre that encompasses both Wheatley's own writings, and the Hammer Horror films. F. R. Leavis did not speak for himself alone when he said:

Charles Williams is ostensibly inspired by Christian doctrine, but if you approach as a literary critic, unstiffened by the determination to "discriminate Christianly", or if you approach merely with order sensitiveness and good sense, you can hardly fail to see that Williams' preoccupation with "the horror of evil" is evidence of an arrest at the schoolboy (and -girl) stage rather than of spiritual maturity, and that his dealings in "myth", mystery, the occult, and the supernatural belong essentially to the ethos of the thriller. To pass off his writings as spiritually edifying is to promote the opposite of spiritual health.'

The immediate context of his remarks was a dismissal of Williams' understanding of Milton, but the comments imply a criticism of Williams' entire corpus. Are we, therefore, dealing with an author who, while explicitly claiming to be extolling the virtues of the light, is fascinated by the terrors of the darkness? If such a fascination is, indeed, evidence of immaturity, what are we to make of Williams? Does he lack self-knowledge, or has he been deliberately dishonest?



In the past many of Williams' defenders have avoided this question, rather than attempting to answer it directly. Even a brief look at his works reveals various occult or mystical symbols; at his life, an active involvement with a group devoted to similar interests. Often these elements have been hurried over, as though any examination of them would expose a damning weakness. His standard biography, for instance, has this to say:

Charles' contact with A. E. Waite had led to their meeting and thus to an invitation for Charles to join his [Waite's] Order of the Golden Dawn. . . . On 6 September 1917 Waite wrote to Charles arranging for his reception into the neophyte (lowest) grade of the Society at the autumnal equinox (17 September). . . . His active membership was probably no more than four or five years. It may be that after his son was born in 1922 he had difficulty in finding a free evening besides his regular lectures and the time he needed for writing. Or he may simply have had enough. . . . In the end, what did Waite's Golden Dawn mean to him ? Surely his outlook and philosophy were not generated or much affected by it. He was thirty-one when he joined and his mind was already well-based, developed and directed.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the confidence of this passage, some important corrections need to be made to it. Williams did not join the Order of the Golden Dawn, but the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross which had been founded and was led by Waite after a split within the Golden Dawn. (However, Williams himself always talked about having belonged to the Golden Dawn<sup>3</sup>, which misled many of his biographers.) More significant is the length of time he spent within the Fellowship. The Minutes of the society record that Williams was "received into the Portal Grade of the Rosy Cross under the Sacramental Name of Qui Sitit Veniat" on 21st September 1917. After that he attended the rituals regularly, and progressed through the Fellowship. According to the Minutes, his final participation was in a ritual to lead him into a higher and more secret order, The Hidden Life of the Rosy Cross, on 29th June 1927 - which means that he was an active member for almost ten years, instead of

Hadfield's "four or five"<sup>4</sup>. Why Williams left at this point is unclear, and has been the subject of much speculation.

The question - "In the end, what did Waite's Golden Dawn/ F:R:C mean to him?" - is, therefore, crucial, and cannot be answered easily. Part of the problem lies in understanding Waite's thought in general, and his vision for the Fellowship in particular. Waite's biographer has summarised the situation in this way:

The Independent and Rectified Rite of the Golden Dawn had been instituted for the benefit of those who saw the Order as "capable of a mystical instead of an occult construction", and in similar manner the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross was mystical, but unlike its predecessor in that it was *wholly* mystical; and although based upon the kabbalah, it was also wholly Christian, as laid down in the constitution: "The mode of interpretation in respect of Kabbalistic Tradition is a Christian Mode".<sup>5</sup>

Clearly a distinction is being made here between occultism and mysticism; a distinction that it is hard to clarify. Often the terms are used loosely as though they were interchangeable, but serious students of both subjects have attempted to separate them. In her magisterial work, *Mysticism* (1911), Evelyn Underhill devotes a considerable amount of time to the links between mysticism and magic, having first made clear her understanding of the difference between them; an understanding which may prove helpful here:

The fundamental difference between the two is this: magic wants to get, mysticism to give - immortal and antagonistic attitudes which turn up under one disguise or another in every age of thought. Both magic and mysticism in their full development bring the whole mental machinery, conscious and subconscious, to bear on their undertaking: both claim that they produce in their initiates powers unknown to ordinary men. But the centre round which that machinery is grouped, the reasons for that undertaking, and the ends to which those powers are applied differ enormously. In mysticism the will is united with the emotions in an impassioned desire to transcend the sense-world in order that the self may be joined by love to the one eternal and ultimate Object of love; whose existence is intuitively perceived by that which we used to call the soul, but now find it easier to refer to as the "Cosmic" or "transcendental" sense. This is the poetic and religious temperament acting upon the plane of reality. In magic,

the will unites with the intellect in an impassioned desire for supersensible knowledge. This is the intellectual, aggressive and scientific temperament trying to extend its field of consciousness, until it includes the supersensual world: obviously the antithesis of mysticism, though often adopting its title and style.<sup>6</sup>

Underhill acknowledges the similarity between the two approaches. Both involve the acquisition of a new perspective from which to see the cosmos, and the expectation that this knowledge will effect a profound change in the initiate. The difference lies in the goals towards which they strive. The mystic sees in order to love, and through that love to be united with the Source of All (throughout her book, Underhill is careful to acknowledge that this is not only a Christian phenomenon, but is experienced by adherents of many religions, and of none). The magician sees in order to control, to gain power that can be used towards a desired end. Although the terms are different, it does not seem unreasonable to make the same distinction between occultism and mysticism. Both attempt to go beyond the world as apprehended by the senses to experience something both would call a "deeper" or "truer" "reality". But having made that "journey" mysticism attempts to abandon all things in order to become one with the Eternal; occultism to possess all things in order to control the transient. Even though not entirely satisfactory, (and although neither Waite nor Williams used these distinctions consistently), for the sake of clarity they will be used in the remainder of this thesis<sup>7</sup>.

Another definition needs to be addressed as well. When Gilbert claims that "the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross . . . was wholly Christian", what meaning should be attached to "Christian" in this context ? Another clause of the Constitution says:

## Early Thought

The Fellowship is open to all who desire the knowledge of Divine Things and union with GOD in Christ, and its path of symbolism is a true light of understanding on the Path of Union.®

This goal echoes biblical phraseology®, and the thinking of Saints such as John of the Cross and Catherine of Siena<sup>10</sup>. But earlier it was stated that:

The tradition and symbolism of the Fellowship are a derivation from the Secret Doctrine of Israel, known as Kabbalah and embodied in the SEPHER HA ZOHAR. <sup>11</sup>

For the Fellowship to derive its "tradition and symbolism" from secret knowledge, however interpreted, sounds suspicious. Indeed the very concept of a society sworn to secrecy about its beliefs and practices has a distinctly gnostic feel to it, and is likely to be sub-Christian at best, even if not antithetical to Christianity. One writer, talking about the effects of gnosticism, describes the danger of:

the church [being] replaced by a club of illuminati possessing secrets hidden from the unsalvable multitude, and even from the uninitiated who claimed the same Redeemer. <sup>12</sup>

The distinction offered above, between occultism and mysticism, would suggest that this is a danger both paths are prone to, with a clear distinction between the adepts and the common herd. Such a two-tier system is roundly rejected by many of the New Testament writers; Paul in particular<sup>13</sup>. Can traces of it can be discerned in the thought of Waite, and, if so, did Williams inherit them?

It may be possible to characterize Waite as a christian mystic - that is, primarily a mystic seeking the revelation that would draw him into union with God. In pursuing that goal he found elements in the Christian tradition - possibly even most of it - beneficial, but they were subservient to his aim, rather than determining it. The stress laid upon

hidden knowledge, and the need for secrecy imposed on the members<sup>14</sup>, means that the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross echoes what little we know of early gnostic groups - its members shared an understanding that set them apart from the rest of the world. Waite himself, as the founder, was clearly a remarkable figure, who had experienced an overwhelming personal revelation, which he wished to pass on to others. But such an experience alone does not make someone a saint, and most churches would want to use "Christian" in a qualified sense to describe somebody in his position.

If such a description is true of Waite, what about Williams? Was he, too, essentially a gnostic, interpreting aspects of Christianity in an esoteric manner in a way denied to the majority? Not only was he a member of the Fellowship, he knew Waite's works in detail, quoted from them and encouraged others to read them.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the central symbols of several of his novels were also the subject matter for Waite's scholarship - the Holy Grail (or Graal, as both authors referred to it), a mysterious Stone inscribed with the Divine Name, and the Tarot pack - while elsewhere in the novels and the poems there are echoes of Waite's thought and diction.

Indeed one writer has stated:

that the Golden Dawn system - or to be correct Waite's heterodox version of that system - is the key without which the deepest and inmost meaningfulness of Williams can never be unlocked.<sup>16</sup>

However, such a conclusion needs to be treated with caution. If we look at the way in which Williams handled these symbols, it seems that he takes great care not to attach too much importance to them in and of themselves. For example, *War in Heaven* revolves around the discovery of the Graal, and the attempts to acquire it made by black magicians who want to use and

finally destroy the power it contains. For the magicians the cup itself is important - even their attempts to unmake it testify to their belief in its value. Two of the Graal Companions, Mornington and the Duke, share this view, so that they are in deep distress when the chalice is handed over. But the third Companion, the Archdeacon, although initially agreeing, later comes implicitly to rebuke such an attitude. When an argument breaks out between Mornington and the Duke as to whom the Graal belongs (the Duke being a Roman Catholic), and old disputes threaten to draw close, the Archdeacon resolves the matter by pointing out its absurdity, and concluding:

But, on the other hand, I will promise not to hurt anyone's feelings by using it prematurely for schismatic Mysteries. A liqueur glass would do as well.<sup>17</sup>

For the celebration of the Eucharist a liqueur glass is quite permissible, but the Archdeacon seems to be implying that, in the divine scheme of things, the Graal is no more, and no less, important than any domestic cup. When the magicians resort to blackmail to gain possession of the chalice, and the priest hands it over, he apologizes:

For myself, I would not have delayed so long. I would give up any relic, however wonderful, to save anyone an hour's neuralgia - man depends too much on these things.<sup>18</sup>

He is actually giving it up to restore a woman who has been driven mad. But his lack of concern over an item that others perceive to be of great worth because of its sanctity, his readiness to abandon it in order that an immediate need should be met, parallels much of the reported life and teaching of Jesus. Christ's attitude to the Sabbath, his implied rebuke to

the scruples of the priests and Levites<sup>19</sup>, is echoed by the actions of this elderly cleric. To a thorough going occultist, an object such as the Graal would be a source of power, to be clung to and used - an attitude exemplified repeatedly by the evil or misguided characters in Williams' novels.<sup>20</sup> Why, then, can the author be so relaxed in his attitude to this relic ?

One possible theological objection to an occult view of the world, is that it might presuppose dualism - two equal and opposite cosmic forces in an eternal struggle, in which human decisions for good or evil could sway the balance. The Archdeacon's perspective, which is ultimately vindicated, is a deep trust in the omnipotence and benevolence of God. When the Duke is incensed because of a blasphemy, an insult to God:

"How can you insult God ?" the Archdeacon asked. "About as much as you can pull His nose. For Kenneth to have knocked Mr. Persimmons down for calling him dishonest would have been natural - a venial sin, at most; for him to have done it in order to avenge God would have been silly. . . ." <sup>21</sup>

Admittedly, his companions do not share this faith - and if they did, there would be little action in the novel - but it grows stronger and deeper in the priest, until even when he is being offered as a sacrifice, even when he feels abandoned by God, he can still say: "I have come because God willed it," <sup>22</sup>. And out of that desolation he knows salvation. This trust is expressed in his constant quoting of Psalm 136, with its repeated: "For His mercy endureth for ever", and is the same as Williams' own. When talking of the nineteenth century, he could say:

The great scientific discoveries of that age (or what then purported to be scientific discoveries) threw both Christendom and non-Christendom very much out of control. The pious feared they might, and the impious thought they undoubtedly had, upset Christendom. This was excusable in the impious, but inexcusable in the pious. <sup>23</sup>

It is the same voice speaking directly in the historical comment, indirectly through the persona of the Archdeacon - the voice of a tried and settled faith. Against such a faith the details of elaborate and malevolent magic rituals seem empty and puerile.

*The Greater Trumps* also has clear occult connections. Here the Tarot pack is more prominent even than the Graal was in the earlier novel, with imagery from the cards rising up in many different situations. Again there are links back to Waite, who produced his own version of the pack (which is still widely used) and wrote a book explaining his interpretation of the symbols. Williams' understanding owes a clear debt to Waite, particularly in his interpretation of the Fool, whom both men understand as sublime, rather than ridiculous<sup>24</sup>. But there are significant differences also. Williams arranges the Major Arcana (the greater Trumps of the title) in his own order. Since the order was important to Waite (relating to the order of the Hebrew alphabet, and so back to the kabbalah) presumably this re-ordering was not simply arbitrary. Moreover, although the Eerdmans edition of *The Greater Trumps* has a cover consisting of Waite's designs (and numbers) for the Arcana, Williams describes enough of the cards to make it clear that he has a different pack in view. No-one has yet discovered a Tarot that matches these descriptions, and it is not improbable that Williams had designed and was using his own cards, which were never available commercially. If so, it underlines the fact that he was immersed in esoteric lore, using sources so widespread that they are hard to identify.

Yet, for all the learning and devotion which has gone into this Tarot, the author refuses to overestimate its importance. The novel describes the discovery of the original pack, from which all other cards have been



derived. Possession of them brings power; reuniting them with the golden images which are their counterparts reveals "the measure of the everlasting dance". But, from the beginning, this revelation is deemed to come as much from the insight of romantic love as the piercing of arcane veils - a theme that recurs throughout Williams' work. When Nancy is first shown the cards by her lover Henry, who is one of the gipsy guardians of this mystery, she asks what he means by "the everlasting dance". He replies by pointing to the seventh card - the Lovers:

"Just that ?" she said.

"That's at least the first movement," he answered; "unless you go with the hermit."<sup>25</sup>

(The Tarot pack has its place within the Via Positiva, the Way of Affirmation of Images, which meant so much to Williams, as does romantic love as a whole. But it is a typical courtesy to acknowledge the value of the Via Negativa, by recognizing the way of the hermit, or asceticism.)

Henry and his grandfather, Aaron Lee, are the protectors of the images, the repositories of hidden knowledge - they are the adepts, who might be expected to enlighten the other characters. But not only are they jealously possessive of what they do know, it emerges that, despite their learning, they do not understand the arcana they have hoarded. Having studied the letter, they have missed the spirit, so that Christ's words to the Jews apply to them also:

Ye search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.<sup>26</sup>

The gipsies have searched the Tarot pack, and yet they have not found life. In understanding "the measure of the everlasting dance" they are soon shown

to be immoral novices. The true adepts are Nancy's aunt, Sybil (who alone can see the Fool moving, the mystery which the gipsies have puzzled over for centuries), and Nancy herself who, under Sybil's guidance, increasingly gives herself to be a channel for Love. This self-giving leads her to be reconciled to Henry when he has tried to kill her father, and to love a mad woman who is tearing her hands - acts of sacrifice parallel to the Archdeacon's. And, as in the earlier novel, this giving to the point of despair becomes the pivot out from which restoration and healing proceed.

The Biblical imagery that lies behind these acts scarcely needs drawing out. The picture of suffering willingly endured so that others may benefit can be found in *Second Isaiah's* Suffering Servant, is deeply rooted in *St. John's Gospel* in particular, and in the rest of the New Testament also<sup>27</sup>. Christ's was the ultimate act of self-giving, but it is an act which every Christian is called upon to repeat and so share in<sup>28</sup> - every Christian, not only those who have received illumination.

Williams is careful to underline the universality of this demand by making an explicit connection between even those themes which at first sight seem most esoteric and the traditional Anglicanism of the period (himself a lifelong member of the Church of England), in a key episode that occurs almost exactly half-way through the novel. Nancy is deeply confused by events, and so she goes to church on Christmas morning because the service will be uneventful, even dull, and so give her a respite:

A door opened; the congregation stirred; a voice from the vestry said: "Hymn 61. 'Christians, awake,' Hymn 61." Everybody awoke, found the place, and stood up. The choir started at once on the hymn and the procession. Nancy docilely sent her voice along with them.

*Christians, awake, salute the happy morn,  
Whereon the Saviour of the world was born:  
Rise to a-*

Her voice ceased; the words stared up at her. The choir and the congregation finished the line -

*adore the mystery of love.*

"The mystery of love." But what else was in her heart? The Christmas associations of the verse had fallen away; there was the direct detached cry, bidding her to do precisely and only what she was burning to do. "Rise to adore the mystery of love." What on earth were they doing, singing about the mystery of love in church? They couldn't possibly be meaning it. Or were they meaning it and had she misunderstood the whole thing?

The church was no longer a defence; it was itself an attack. From another side the waves of some impetuous and greater life swept in upon her. She turned her head abruptly towards Sybil, who felt the movement and looked back, her own voice pausing on "the praises of redeeming love". Nancy, her finger pointing to the first of those great verses, whispered a question, "Is it true?" Sybil looked at the line, looked back at Nancy, and answered in a voice both aspirant and triumphant, "Try it, darling." The tall figure, the wise mature face, the dark ineffable eyes, challenged, exhorted, and encouraged. Nancy throbbed to the voice that broke into the next couplet - "God's highest glory was their anthem still."<sup>29</sup>

In many ways this passage represents what is best and worst about Williams' prose. There is the gently ironic humour - "Everybody awoke" - that establishes a mundane backcloth against which Nancy's discovery can shine. For it is important that this understanding, this challenge, does not come from any hidden wisdom or secret tradition, but from something so well known that it has become almost stale - "a very commonplace hymn, a very poor copy of verses", as the narrative continues. The confusion Nancy feels is reflected by antitheses - "They couldn't possibly be meaning it / were they meaning it", "defence / attack" - the urgency by restrained alliteration - "bidding her to do . . . what she was burning to do." Although tinged with purple, the prose is simple and direct, and therefore successful. Unfortunately the sentimental aspect of Williams' style

destroys most of the effect in three words - "Try it, darling" - and the subsequent description of Sybil piles up adjectives superfluously.

But the point is made. Williams was not promoting an esoteric sect, rather he was linking the wonders he describes with the conventional - humdrum, even - details that make up so large a part of the life of a Christian of whatever tradition. When he established (founded is too definite a word) the Companions of the Co-inherence in 1939, he did not turn back to the detailed covertness of the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross. Instead of pledges of secrecy, there is an openness about all the arrangements. The sentences Williams drew up to guide the Companions begin:

The Order has no constitution except in its members<sup>30</sup>

that is, there were to be no conditions of membership, unless a concern for others be reckoned such. The mysteries he commends do not come from the Kabbalah, or any Secret Doctrine. Rather, they are the study:

of the Co-inherence of the Holy and Blessed Trinity, of the Union of the Two Natures in One Person, of the relation of the God-bearer and the Flesh-taker, of the exchange of the offerings of the Eucharist, and of the whole Catholic Church.<sup>30</sup>

He was not bringing a new revelation, but showing the glory there is in what we already know but have overlooked. All the fantastic imagery of *The Greater Trumps* surrounds a single point - "the mystery of love". This is what, more than anything else, distinguishes Charles Williams from Waite, and other similar figures. Willard, talking of the relationship between the two men could say:

Williams was also silent about his reasons for leaving the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross, which may have amounted to sheer lack of time. He valued the idea of a society within Christendom, working to further its ends, or else he would not have begun his own group some twelve years later. But he distrusted secrets except insofar as they were open to all who had eyes to see. Although secrecy could knit

people together, it more often kept them apart; the further one went in the order, the further one grew from the world outside the window; what began as an affirmation became, to this extent, a rejection. . . . Williams seems to have concluded that the esoteric church cannot stand alone, cannot substitute for such "acts" of charity as Jesus commanded and the apostles performed. As Waite continued to build the heterodox F:R:C:, Williams became more orthodox.<sup>31</sup>

The occult devotee seeks power. This path Williams pointed to only to reject (except, possibly, in *Shadows of Ecstasy*<sup>32</sup>.) The disciple of mysticism seeks transformation, which may involve flirting with gnosticism. Again it is a path that Williams could paint attractively, for he had known its pull. He publicly acknowledged the debt he owed to Underhill, a debt owed to her fictional as well as factual works<sup>33</sup>. But her influence was not such as to draw him to explore the spiritual world at the expense of the material world. Writing of *Mysticism* he said:

The present writer must have read it first within a year or two of its appearance. What then remained in his mind - and still remains - was not the analysis of the relation between mysticism and magic or symbolism, and not the psychological analysis, but the authentic sayings - or rather the general sense of the authentic sayings. It was a great book precisely not because of its originality, but because of its immediate sense of authenticity. Open it now three times at random -

1) "The just man goes *towards* God by inward love in perpetual activity and *in* God in virtue of his fruitive affection in eternal rest." - RUYSBROECK

2)"There is none other God than He that none may know, which may not be known. No, soothly, no ! Without fail, No, says she (the contemplative soul). He only is my God that none can one word of say, nor all they of Paradise one only point attain nor understand, for all the knowing that they have of him." - *The Mirror of Simple Souls*

3)The soul "is so full of peace that though she presses her flesh, her nerves, her bones, no other thing comes forth from them than peace." - ST. CATHERINE OF GENOA

These three sayings were exhibited by three random openings, and so it is with the whole book. To the reader, Evelyn Underhill, as

the author, was altogether occulted by the dark or shining fierceness of the sayings she had collected.<sup>34</sup>

Two things are striking about this passage. Firstly, Williams appreciated *Mysticism* because it did not create new ideas, but linked him with the pre-existent Christian tradition. The sense of continuity with what had gone before was highly important to him - indeed the credal statement of belief in "the communion of saints" was to be revitalized in his understanding of the web of co-inherence that links all Christians<sup>35</sup>. Williams did not see himself as a pioneer, exploring uncharted territory, but, at most, as a guide taking well trodden paths. It is also noteworthy that the passages he comes to "at random" speak of the union of the soul with God, the Unknown, and the felicity this brings - classic descriptions of the *Via Negativa* approach to spirituality. The respect which Williams had for this way has already been noted, but it was one he could not follow personally. Rather than turn away from all that could hide God, Williams looked for glimpses of God in everything that came to him - balanced always by his epigram: "This also is Thou; neither is this Thou".

Only in *Many Dimensions* does the central resolution depend on such an act of resignation<sup>36</sup>, and Chloe Burnett's comment as she makes it: "I have nothing at all to do" is an apt description of this discipline<sup>37</sup>. There are a variety of reasons why this is not one of Williams' most successful novels<sup>38</sup>, but among them lies the fact that such an approach did not come easily to his temperament. The prevailing religious imagery underlines this for, uniquely in his fiction, it is not Christian but Islamic. Certainly Williams made use of Islamic motifs elsewhere, particularly in the

collection of poetry *Taliessin Through Logres*. But the symbolism attached to Islam in his mind was an almost Manichaeian division between Creator and creation, the antithesis of all that was Incarnational<sup>39</sup>. It is a danger that ascetics have always had to guard against, lest their renunciation of the world should become a denial of the goodness of the created order. And ultimately there was only one secret that Williams was interested in - the open secret of the Incarnation. This knowledge is available to all, not just a group of illuminati; as an artist, his task was to tell us what we already knew.

An examination of the roots of Williams' ideas, the events that he experienced, throws up not only similarities with, but profound differences from, his mature thought. In this area Waite is the most easily identifiable influence, and various links are clearly traceable. However Waite's biographer can conclude that, although in his novels Williams used:

concepts that [he] could, and probably did, find in A. E. Waite's fellowship of the Rosy Cross, the elegant structure of his work and the peculiar orthodoxy of his theology are Williams' own.<sup>40</sup>

Williams had an early interest in occultism, which grew into an interest in mysticism. However, T. S. Eliot summed up the novelist, saying:

It would be easy, but not particularly profitable, to classify Williams as a "mystic". He knew, and could put into words, states of consciousness of a mystical kind, and the sort of elusive experience which many people have once or twice in a life-time. (I am thinking of certain passages in *The Place of the Lion*, but there is no novel without them.) And if "mysticism" means a belief in the supernatural, and its operation in the natural world, then Williams was a mystic: but that is only belief in what adherents of every religion in the world profess to believe. His is a mysticism, not of curiosity, or of the lust for power, but of Love.<sup>41</sup>

Footnotes:

1. F. R. Leavis *The Common Pursuit*, Pelican Books 1978, pg. 253, reprinted from *Scrutiny*, vol. 16, no. 4, (Winter 1949) pgs. 339-44, "The Logic of Christian Discrimination".
2. A. M. Hadfield *Charles Williams: an Exploration of his Life and Work*, OUP, 1983, pgs. 29-30. In her previous biography *An Introduction to Charles Williams*, OUP, 1959, Waite was not mentioned.
3. A. Ridler, introduction to *The Image of the City* OUP, 1958, pg. xxiv
4. I am grateful to R. A. Gilbert for showing me the Minutes of the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross, which are now in his possession. See also his *A. E. Waite: Magician of Many Parts* Crucible, 1987, pgs. 148-50.
5. For the entire Constitution of The Fellowship of the Rosy Cross, see Appendix B, pg. 145
6. Evelyn Underhill *Mysticism*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., Third Edition Revised 1912, pg. 84
7. This distinction was important to Waite, but less so to Williams, who could acknowledge: "The word 'occult' has come into general use, and is convenient, if no moral sense is given it simply as itself. It deals with hidden things, and their investigation." *Image of the City*, pg. 83
8. See Appendix B, pg. 145
9. Among others, *St. John* 17.3, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* 5.19
10. St. John of the Cross, "Et una Noche Escura" Stanza 1; St. Catherine of Siena, *Dialogo*, cap. 1. Both quoted in *Mysticism* pgs. 99-100.
11. See Appendix B, pg. 145
12. A. F. Wallis, "Gnosticism" in *The New Bible Dictionary*, IVP, 1965, pg. 473
13. Among others, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* 3.8-10, *The Epistle to the Colossians* 1.26, both of which talk about the "mystery", hidden for ages, having been fully revealed in the apostolic preaching and the life of the Church.
14. Appendix B, pg. 145, Paragraphs 11, 12c, 19.
15. Williams quotes from Waite's *The Hidden Church of the Holy Grail* in *Arthurian Torso*, p. 262 of the One Volume Edition of *Taliessin through Logres, The Region of the Summer Stars* and *Arthurian Torso*, Eerdmans 1976. Ridler records him encouraging her to read Waite's *The Secret Doctrine in Israel* in the introduction to *The Image of the City*, pg. xxv



16. Francis King *Ritual Magic in England: 1887 to the Present Day* Neville Spearman, 1970, pg. 112
17. *War in Heaven*. First published Gollancz 1930, reprinted Eerdmans 1982, pg. 138. All future references are to the Eerdmans edition
18. *Ibid*, pg. 184
19. e.g. the discussion of the Sabbath in *St. Luke* 6.1-11, and the Parable of the Good Samaritan *St. Luke* 10.25-37
20. There may be a parallel here with J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, where the evil or misguided characters, such as Saruman, Boromir or Denethor, want to retain the One Ring and use its power, whereas those who are clearly good, such as Gandalf, Elrond and Galadriel reject it and seek its destruction. Critics who interpret the book as a religious work see this act of kenosis as a major Christian theme in the work.
21. *War in Heaven*, pg. 135
22. *Ibid*, pg. 240
23. *The Descent of the Dove*, Longmans, 1939, pg. 219
24. A. E. Waite *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot*. Originally published 1911, reprinted by University Books 1959, pp. 152-5. Wheatley, in the introduction he wrote to *War in Heaven* for the edition published as part of his *Library of the Occult*, shows the depth of regard for the material he was handling by giving as authoritative his own arrangement of the Tarot pack. This was closer to that of Waite than of Williams, but differed from both.
25. *The Greater Trumps*. First published Gollancz 1932, reprinted Eerdmans 1978, p. 22. All future references are to the Eerdmans edition. For an extended discussion of the role of romantic love in this novel, see below, pgs. 102-107
26. *St. John* 5.39, 40
27. *Isaiah* 52.13-53.12, *St. John* 10.18, 16.20-22, 19.32-34, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* 2.13-16, *The First Epistle of Peter* 2.21-24
28. *St. John* 13.14, 15, *The Epistle to the Colossians* 1.24, 25, *The First Epistle of John* 3.16
29. *The Greater Trumps* pgs. 107-8
30. See below, Appendix C, pg. 148
31. Thomas Willard "Acts of the Companions: A. E. Waite's Fellowship and the Novels of Charles Williams", an essay awaiting publication, pg. 33. I am indebted to Willard's work for much of the background for this chapter.

32. See below, Section 3.1, pg. 47 ff, for a discussion of *Shadows of Ecstasy*
33. See G. Cavaliero *Charles Williams: Poet of Theology*, Macmillan, 1983, pgs. 56-58
34. In the Introduction to *The Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, Longmans, Green & Co., 1943, pg. 17
35. In patristic times the term "co-inherence" was used to describe the relationship between the members of the Trinity. See below, pgs. 32-33, for a discussion of how Williams uses this theological term.
36. In *The Place of the Lion* Richardson abandons himself to the End, and it is implied that he is consumed by supernatural fire. But this is incidental to the main action of the novel, and does not resolve the plot.
37. *Many Dimensions*, Gollancz, 1931. Reprinted Eerdmans 1981, p. 258 cf. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. P. Hodgson, Early English Text Society, 1944, ch. 34, p. 70: "And, yif I schal schortlyer sey, lat þat þing do wip þee & lede þee wher-so it list. Lat it be þe worcher, & þou bot þe sufferer; do bot loke apon it, & lat it alone. Medel þee not þer-wip as þou woldest help it, for drede lest þou spille al." Underhill had produced a modernized text in 1912.
38. See below, section 3.3, pg. 72 ff, for a discussion of *Many Dimensions*
39. Expressed in an undated letter from CW to C. S. Lewis, in the Library of the Charles Williams Society, in which he gave some explanatory notes to *Taliessin Through Logres*. The relevant section is quoted below, on pg. 76
40. R. A. Gilbert *The Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians* Aquarian Press, 1983, pg. 87
41. T. S. Eliot, Introduction to *All Hallows' Eve*, Eerdmans Paperback, 1981, pg. xvii

## 2: The Nature of Co-inherence

"The elegant structure of [Williams'] work and the peculiar orthodoxy of his theology"<sup>1</sup> can be brought into sharper focus if he is compared with one of the systematic theologians of the period. It must be said that he was not part of the main stream of contemporary theological thought. Although he could quote from Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*<sup>2</sup>, there is little evidence that he was affected by the dogmatic theology that emerged from Germany during his lifetime. Not that Williams was ignorant of works of scholarship. He read widely<sup>3</sup>, if eccentrically, to the extent that it would be an impossible task to identify all the books that influenced him. However, the most interesting parallel is with a theologian of the generation preceding Williams', whom the younger man never quoted or publicly acknowledged a debt to. This was the Anglican priest, R. C. Moberly, whose *Atonement and Personality* (1901) has been described as: "perhaps the most original and profound study of the atonement in modern Anglican theology"<sup>4</sup>. In his preface Moberly identifies one of the key problems in discussing this area:

There are presuppositions about personality which have so aggravated the moral difficulty as to make it appear to many minds insuperable. And it is the correction of such presuppositions about personality which will be the natural solution of the difficulties. Two principles may be mentioned, which our thought is apt to assume; first, that the essential of personality is mutual exclusiveness, or (in vivid metaphor) mutual impenetrability; and the second that (as a corollary from the first) what was done by another, being vital in him not in us, cannot make an essential contrast of content or character within ourselves. Our distinctness from one another, and from Christ, regarded as primary, essential and final, and exaggerated to a point at which distinctness becomes not distinctness only but mutual separation, exclusiveness, independence, - perhaps even antithesis: this is a fundamental root of much difficulty that is felt, whether consciously or unconsciously, upon the whole subject. It is a difficulty which has

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grown up out of the developed assumptions of human intellect. It is hardly inherent or original. But is the assumption true ?<sup>5</sup>

That is not the only question which the book addresses, of course. The bulk of the text is a detailed and systematic exploration of penitence and forgiveness, of Christ's obedience and his death - of the many strands that make up an understanding of the atonement. Most of that material lies outside the scope of this discussion. But at various key points Moberly returns to the consideration of the essence of human personality - how and in what way we affect each other - a subject with which Williams was also to deal.

In his examination Moberly uses, in the main, two lines of argument. One approach is to look at the way in which people influence each other in the normal course of life. When somebody sins, it is argued, she/he is not the only person to experience sorrow or shame. Others will share in those emotions, will actually feel them more strongly than the reprobate. Her/his capacity for penitence has been blunted by her/his active involvement in sin - their non-involvement makes them more keenly aware of the sinfulness of the act, so that their sorrow can be deeper and more sincere. And it is this vicarious penitence which may be the ground for hope of the reprobate's personal penitence<sup>6</sup>. The strongest demonstration of this in practice lies in a parent's sorrow over the sin of a child:

The penitence of the child may be fiercer and wilder; but it is, in comparison, shallow, mixed, impotent, unreal. But the mother's anguish is not less anguish, but more, because it is without that confusing presence of sin. If it is less despairing, it is more profound. Even now the sorrow of the child is checked, steadied, solemnized, uplifted, by the felt sanctity of the mother's sorrow - a sorrow at once more heartbroken and more calm of heart. . . . Yes, it is the mother's heart which is broken for sin; broken even, it may be, unto death. The child's heart is less likely to break. The true realization of shame, the true steady insight into sin, is dulled, not sharpened, by the indwelling of sin. The heart of the

child is not able to break - at least yet. Only long afterwards, if at all, when penitence has at last done its slow, penetrating, tranquillizing work, will sin, as sin, be felt and seen as it is.<sup>7</sup>

So far as the holiness alone is concerned, we might find other cases as illustrative as that of a mother. But perhaps there is no other relation, in human experience, which enables us equally to realize how far unselfishness can go towards the self-identifying of one person with another in the unity of nature and of love.<sup>8</sup>

Moberly has already argued that perfect penitence is impossible for any of us, for we have all sinned. But each act of repentance, however incomplete, involves *μετανοια* - a deep inner change, or conversion - to the extent that ideal penitence would involve an identification with righteousness<sup>9</sup>. Because sin mars this identification, the mother can be more penitent over the sins of her child than the child who committed those sins can. And the depth of this love - which identifies her both with her sinful child and with righteousness - undergirds his belief in the possible efficacy of vicarious penitence. It is, however, an idealized description of maternal feeling, possibly even a sentimental one. And the vision of "the felt sanctity of the mother's sorrow" moderating the extremes of the child's despair might suggest parental emotional manipulation - which is to say no more than that this is an imperfect parallel with the act of atonement which, however understood, is widely accepted as perfect. It does not mean that the core experience - of vicarious penitence contributing to personal transformation - is thereby falsified. But it does mean that the argument cannot be allowed to rest here.

As he moves on to consider the crucifixion, Moberly considers in what way that event can be said to affect us. He rejects any explanation that supposes Christ's selfless offering to be no more than an example for us to follow, a motive to make us love, or an object for our love. More than that

is needed if the life of Christ is to effect any vital change in our own personal reality. We need to be identified with Christ; and for that we need to move beyond Calvary to Pentecost:

For what is the real consummation of the atonement to be? It is to be - the very Spirit of the Crucified become our Spirit - ourselves translated into the Spirit of the Crucified. The Spirit of the Crucified, the Spirit of Him who died and is alive, may be, and please God shall be, the very constituting reality of ourselves.<sup>10</sup>

This could sound ominous; a divine "take over", with the Holy Spirit replacing our own "constituting reality". Moberly meets this charge by reapplying an earlier argument. If human personality can be conceived in terms of free will, or reason, or love, we can see that the reality of sin has distorted and fettered all of these elements. Just as the sinful person could not experience penitence truly, so she/he cannot possess fully these three component aspects. It is only by the indwelling of the Spirit of God that we can become our true selves. And because this act of indwelling is also an act of creation, it would be wrong to conceive of the Spirit as a gift given by God which "I" receive. It is only through this receiving that the "I" exists, that "I" become:

He is not a mere presence *in* me, overruling, controlling, displacing. What He in me does, I do. What he in me wills, I will. What He in me loves, I love. Nay, never is my will so really free: never is my power so worthy of being called power: never is my rational wisdom so rational or so wise; never is my love so really love; never moreover is any one of these things so really my own; never am I, as I, so capable, so personal, so real; never am I, in a word, as really what the real "I" always tried to mean; as when by the true indwelling of the Spirit of God, I enter into the realization of myself; as when I at last correspond to, and fulfil, and expand in fulfilling, all the unexplored possibilities of my personal being, by a perfect mirroring of the Spirit of Christ; as when in Him and by Him I am, at last, a true, willing, personal response to the very Being of God.<sup>11</sup>

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Moberly took this line of thought no further, even though another step suggests itself. If my "I" only exists through the activity of the Spirit, and your "I" comes into being through that same Spirit, it might be possible to say that the ground of our personalities is identical - the Spirit. Moberly never went as far as this, but this possibility seems to have been the starting point for much of Charles Williams' writing. Williams was gripped by an awareness of the inter-connectedness of all Christians, the powerful way in which they are related, even as Moberly could be. At times the two writers could express their thought in similar ways. A passage such as:

Are we not, after all, much more of one piece than we are willing to recognize ? We cannot either do or suffer, cannot lose or win, cannot, however secretly, either sin or repent, to ourselves alone. Whatever is really personal to, or a part of, ourselves tends to become, in greater degree or less, by processes gradual but sure, personal to and a part of many selves besides.<sup>12</sup>

could almost be ascribed to either author. In fact it belongs to Moberly - the younger man would have been far less likely to ask questions about the possibility rather than assert the reality. Williams was not a systematic theologian, and he never argued his persuasion through from first principles. Although he did explain his understanding on various occasions (as will be examined shortly) his insight is most frequently expressed through his creative writing. It is possible that he believed this approach needed no serious justification by himself. Was it not a fundamental, if neglected, part of the Christian faith, that Christians merely needed to be reminded of in order to practise ?

The assurance that Williams possessed, an assurance that indicates his own belief that what he was saying would be readily intelligible to others,

is well illustrated by a piece of light verse that was published in *Time and Tide*, December 1940. Entitled "Apologue on the Parable of the Wedding Garment", it envisages the "Prince Immanuel" sending out invitations to a ball - specifically a fancy dress ball. One lord, a virtuous man, well known to the Prince, prefers to come dressed, as always, as himself. He is refused entry, but looking in he sees:

Cloaks, brooches, decorations, swords,  
jewels - every virtue that affords  
(by dispensation of the Throne)  
beauty to wearers not their own.  
This guest his brother's courage wore;  
that, his wife's zeal, while, just before,  
she in his steady patience shone;  
there a young lover had put on  
the fine integrity of sense  
his mistress used; magnificence  
a father borrowed of his son,  
who was not there ashamed to don  
his father's wise economy.

No moral wrong is held against the lord, save that he is wearing his own clothes, displaying his own virtues, rather than those belonging to his neighbour:

He had his own; his own was all  
but that permitted at the Ball.  
The darkness creeping down the street  
received his virtuous shining feet;  
and, courteous as such beings are,  
the Angels bowed him to his car.<sup>13</sup>

The idea of being able to borrow and wear qualities belonging to somebody else can be grasped readily, when they are imagined as jewels or decorations. The picture is attractive and humorous, and yet is it not essentially fantastic? In moral terms, the good done by an individual benefits her/him alone. How can it be possible to "borrow" economy or magnificence from somebody else?



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The answer lies in Williams' understanding of co-inherence - or substitution, or exchange (all three terms are widely used, with little distinction) - which receives frequent expression in all of his works, becoming more explicit, more confidently asserted, towards the end of his life. The fullest explanation of his understanding comes in two places: the chapter on "The Practice of Substituted Love" in *He Came Down From Heaven* (1938), and "The Way of Exchange", a pamphlet in the *New Foundation* series (1941)<sup>14</sup>. There are broad similarities between them.

"The Way of Exchange" opens with a consideration of the way that everyone is influenced by the rest of society. The German nation and the British nation were then at war, no matter what an individual of either nationality felt about an individual of the other. And the effect remains the same, even over much smaller matters: "We are always in the condition that we are because of others"<sup>15</sup>. Looking back, the Roman Empire was organized on the understanding that someone would do one job, while someone else would do something different. There was, and is, an exchange of labours. No-one could do everything, but each could benefit from the work of all, with money being "the medium of that exchange"<sup>16</sup>. This is social exchange, with the smooth running of society being a reflection of a deeper, spiritual truth - the ordering of the body of Christ.

Making the move from social order to Christian truth is not necessarily a simple act. The sceptic may feel that she/he is required to leap from that which is so obvious as to be almost banal to the unclear territory of the deeply esoteric. To Williams the connection is plain, having plentiful scriptural support. In "The Practice of Substituted Love" he quotes from the *First Epistle of John*:

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"Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us, and we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. . . if we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us." [1 John 3.16, 4.12] We are to love each other as he loved us, laying down our lives as he did, that this love may be perfected. We are to love each other, that is, by acts of substitution. We are to be substituted and to bear substitution. All life is to be vicarious - at least all life in the kingdom of heaven is to be vicarious.<sup>17</sup>

and he refers to the practice of sponsors at infant baptism as a simple example of this principle in action: "the making a committal of oneself from another's heart and by another's intention". This goes deeper than just helping one another, lending a sympathetic ear in times of trouble, or active participation in resolving somebody else's problems. It could be described as empathy, if that concept be taken literally - ἐμπαθεια, a suffering in, rather than with, somebody else. What is involved is the same sort of self-identification with another person that Moberly was talking about, even if Williams' application is much broader. There is a profound involvement, a sharing in, the situation that other person faces. Yet even that description makes the operation sound too external - the sharing is in the person rather than the situation. The writings of the Desert Fathers seem to have influenced Williams in his understanding of this identification, and he quotes with approval the disciples of St. Anthony:

A certain old man used to say, "It is right for a man to take up the burden for those who are akin (or near) to him, whatsoever it may be, and, so to speak, to put his own soul in the place of that of his neighbour, and to become, if it were possible, a double man; and he must suffer, and weep, and mourn with him, and finally the matter must be accounted as if he himself had put on the actual body of his neighbour, and as if he had acquired his countenance and soul, and he must suffer for him as he would for himself."<sup>18</sup>

Williams does not give the original context or application of this remark, but he took it as a paradigm for the continuing work of

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substitution<sup>19</sup>. In both of the essays under consideration here he considers the Pauline injunction: "bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (*Galatians* 6.2), of which he was wont to remark, "So much more than carrying each other's shopping!"<sup>20</sup>. He does not dismiss the application to exterior acts of charity, but believes it to have a fuller meaning with regard to the inner life. It may happen instinctively, between those who love one another, or as a great operation, as practised by the religious Orders. But in ordinary life it can be facilitated by the use of a compact of substitution. "Any such agreement has three points: (i) to know the burden; (ii) to give up the burden; (iii) to take up the burden."<sup>21</sup> That is, if person *A* is worried about, or frightened by, a certain problem, person *B* could agree to carry the burden of that worry or fear for *A*. The problem still remains, but *A* need no longer be distressed by it, for *B* is being distressed on her/his behalf.

The clearest example of this in the novels comes in *Descent Into Hell*, published the year before *He Came Down From Heaven*. Pauline Anstruther lives with a secret fear, which she confesses to Peter Stanhope - on various occasions she has met her exact double, her *doppelgänger*, and she is terrified of it happening again. Step (i) is completed - the burden is known. He offers to carry her fear, explaining that this is possible and quoting *Galatians* 6. v2. Pauline is sceptical, but eventually agrees to try. She will no longer be afraid, for Stanhope is being afraid in her place. Step (ii) - the burden has been given up. He then imaginatively recreates her experience, imagining her meeting another Pauline and taking upon himself all the terror attendant upon such a meeting. Step (iii) - the burden is taken up. Pauline is able to enjoy the rest of the evening, and

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to think calmly about the experiences she has had and may have again, for she is no longer weighed down by her fear. As a result, when she meets her double finally it is as part of an experience in which she is able to carry the fear of burning of one of her ancestors, a Marian martyr who went to the stake some four hundred years earlier<sup>22</sup>.

Thus substitution is outlined and illustrated, and it seems to have worked beyond the pages of fiction<sup>23</sup>. But is there sufficient theological justification for the idea? There are several biblical passages that could be read in this manner (which will be examined below), and many orthodox and conventional ideas are used in the framework. And yet, in its final outworking, this concept is highly idiosyncratic - some might even say eccentric. If it is as central to Christian experience as Williams claims, why does it not find explicit expression in the pages of the New Testament, and in the continuing Christian tradition?

Against such an objection, it could be observed that there are some central Christian doctrines which do not receive explicit statement within the New Testament - the most obvious being the Trinity. Had that been a clear cut concept the Church would have been spared several centuries of bitter theological wrangling. A traditionalist would argue that it was only as the implications of Biblical passages were fully considered that the truth was slowly revealed, and the Trinity fully defined, even though it is not strictly a "Biblical" expression. Williams was aware of this unfolding understanding, and used some of the terms from it to expound his belief. G.L. Prestige's *God in Patristic Thought* (which we know Williams had read<sup>24</sup>) devotes a chapter to the topic of "Co-Inherence", in which he describes how one of the problems associated with the tension between three

persons and one God was met by the understanding that each person completely fills, or co-inheres, in the other persons. This received its fullest expression in the writings of Pseudo-Cyril, using the term "perichoresis". Talking of the three hypostaseis:

they are united, [Pseudo-Cyril] says, not so as to be confounded, but so as to adhere to (ἔχεσθαι) one another, and they possess co-inherence without any coalescence or comixture. Again he quotes (cap. 23) the text "I am in the Father and the Father in me," as evidence of the co-inherence in one another of the hypostaseis, and the undeparting session (ἰδρυσίς) of the Son in the Father, as Word, as Wisdom, as Power, and as Radiance.<sup>25</sup>

The verse referred to (John 17. v21) is completed by the statement: "that they also may be one in us", and this movement from divine to human existence is exactly what Williams was seeking to express. When he uses the term "co-inherence" he refers to this chapter, saying:

This is the clearest exposition I know of the theological definition of the Divine Life in this sense. Humanly, the word stands for the idea of the "in-othering" and "in-Godding" of men which appears in Dante.<sup>24</sup>

If there is a tension within the Godhead between distinctiveness and essential unity which needs to be reconciled, Charles Williams was attempting the same reconciliation within humanity. Small wonder he found this patristic understanding fruitful.

Moving backwards chronologically, to the pages of the New Testament, it must be admitted that they contain no schematized expression of exchange, such as was outlined earlier<sup>26</sup>. But, if the Pauline image of the church as the body of Christ is considered, it may be that some support could be found there. The comparison between a group of individuals and a single body is used elsewhere in Greek literature, but in Paul's hands it receives a distinctive development:

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Only in Ephesians and Colossians is Christ the head of the Church; in the earlier epistles He is (by implication) the body itself. . . . In either case, this "organic" conception is distinctively Christian (some maintain, distinctively Pauline). Occasionally earlier non-Christian writers had already compared the universe or a state or a group of people to a body; but the distinctive thing is that the Church is not "the body of Christians" - a mere growing aggregate of persons - but "the body of Christ" - part of an already existing personality. The most probable explanation of this striking usage is to be found in the discovery, common to all Christians, that Jesus, vivid historical individual though He was, was also in some mysterious way more than individual: He was, and is, an inclusive personality; He *is* His people.<sup>27</sup>

This image occurs in several passages, but is unfolded chiefly in *1 Corinthians* 12. The main thrust of the passage is, once again, the harmony between distinctiveness of function and common identity, this time on the human level. Despite the many different gifts manifested by church members, Paul argues, Christ only has one body, to which they all belong. They belong because they all participate in the Spirit, who is the author of the gifts expressed. So strong is this bond that those members who seem useless are in fact the most necessary (v.22); so strong that if one member suffers, all the members suffer, if one rejoices, all rejoice (v.26). In order to give these last two statements their full weight they cannot be seen as pleasant bonhomie, or exhortations to team spirit. Paul is envisaging a more than natural unity; a spiritual relationship, made possible because the Spirit has incorporated each individual into Christ. A work of exchange is seen as taking place between these individuals, that leaps over the barriers that are commonly imagined to exist between people seen as disparate. This work strikes at the root of the first presupposition about personality mentioned by Moberly: "that the essential

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of personality is mutual exclusiveness, or (in vivid metaphor) mutual impenetrability"<sup>28</sup>, and allows the "in-othering" of which Williams spoke.

The idea of "the body" is not one on which Williams spent much time. He preferred to draw support from the texts: "that they may be one, as we are" (*John* 17. v11), and "bear ye one another's burdens" (*Galatians* 6. v2), but, paradoxically, his very neglect of this concept seems to lend it greater strength to support his vision. There certainly seems to be enough material to justify the main thrust of his contention - that our responsibility towards other Christians goes beyond physical action, because we share a spiritual identity. Through the work of Christ we participate in the life of the Godhead, a participation which binds us to all those who share it also - "all life in the kingdom of heaven is to be vicarious"<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, our continuing salvation is a an outworking of this, an exploration of these relationships. If such an inter-connectedness is the divine pattern, then its opposite is clear - increasing independence and isolation. Without borrowed clothes, there is no admittance to the ball.

Of all Williams' works, it is *Descent into Hell* that devotes most attention to the condition of someone who deliberately refuses co-inherence - to the extent that he retreats into a private fantasy rather than take the risk of making connections with other human beings. This important novel will not be discussed at this point, as it will receive fuller consideration later in the thesis. However, the theme of rejection and isolation is one to which the writer returned at various points.

In *The Region of the Summer Stars*, the penultimate poem, "The Meditation of Mordred", describes the final breaking up of the realm of Logres. Arthur is in Gaul laying seige to Lancelot, having rejected the

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Pope's request for peace and forgiveness. Guinevere, her unfaithfulness revealed, has sought refuge at Almesbury priory, while the bastard Mordred is acting as regent and planning betrayal. In his thinking he holds cheap those things which should be valuable - classing the Grail as a "fairy mechanism"<sup>20</sup>, and enjoying the thought of the queen being attacked by the mob<sup>21</sup>. Finally his thoughts turn to far P'o-l'u, the antithesis of all the Empire represents, and the strange headless Emperor who walks among the octopuses. Mordred concludes:

Here, as he in the antipodean seas,  
I will have my choice, and be adored for the having;  
when my father King Arthur has fallen in the wood of his elms,  
I will sit here alone in a kingdom of Paradise.<sup>22</sup>

The emphasis falls on "I will have *my* choice", "I will sit here *alone*" - alone in Paradise. Williams often referred to the Genesis narrative<sup>23</sup>, well aware that, even in Eden, it was "not good that the man should be alone" (*Genesis* 2 v18). Mordred has rejected co-inherence for his own immediate gratification. He has repeated the sin of his father in exalting his own pleasure over the function he should fulfil for the sake of others, even as Arthur "beheld and loved himself crowned"<sup>24</sup> in the Mass itself. The subordination of private satisfaction to public duty is another way of talking about the duties of co-inherence, and as such is one of the key concepts in the Arthurian cycle. *Taliessin through Logres*, the first volume, has an extract from Dante as an inscription:

Unde est, quod non operatio properia propter essentiam, sed haec propter illiam habet ut sit.

(Therefore it follows that the operation does not exist for the sake of the essence, but the essence for the sake of the operation.)<sup>25</sup>



Mordred has set himself against what Williams perceived to be the underlying nature of the universe; exemplified by the Empire as an ideal, where each individual works not for her/himself, but for the good of others.

However, this is not to say that Mordred has reached a position where forgiveness is no longer possible<sup>36</sup>. He has followed Arthur's example, yet Arthur was finally forgiven and restored, taking his part in the weaving of the web<sup>37</sup> once more. There remains hope for Mordred, even though his final fate is not revealed. In his writings, Williams makes it quite clear that there is no evil that cannot be redeemed. The final poem of the cycle as we have it (Williams was intending to write a third volume before he died) reviews the terrible destruction and loss that has destroyed Logres and divided the Empire. The evil necromancy of P'o-l'u seems to be victorious. But then the mood changes, and two significant things happen. Even as Taliessin's Company is dissolved, it is re-established, admitting its own superfluity but continuing the work of exchange. And Bors, Percivale, and Galahad finally reach the land of the Trinity - the Grail is achieved. Then it is that the all enveloping tentacles of P'o-l'u are checked, they are enveloped by something stronger:

The roots of Broceliande fastened on them  
length lying along length and gripping length;  
in the ocean where near and far are infinite and equal  
the hollow suckers of the vast slimy tentacles  
were tautened on Nimue's trees through the seas of P'o-l'u,  
and fixed to a regimen; .... the giant octopods  
hung helpless. <sup>38</sup>

And even as the headless Emperor dissolves:

The roses of the world bloomed from Burma to Logres;  
pure and secure from the lost tentacles of P'o-l'u,  
the women of Burma walked with the women of Caerleon. <sup>39</sup>

It is a striking picture of universal redemption (exemplified by the concord/co-inherence of the women of Burma and Caerleon), underlined by the assertion that all souls, living and dead, are:  
co-inherent all in Adam and all in Christ.<sup>40</sup>

What does Williams offer, however, to lend strength to this pleasing image? Is he displaying mere verbal facility, or does he offer an insight into the nature of evil sufficient to justify his confidence that it can be redeemed? The tension between belief in an omnipotent, beneficent God and the perceived existence of evil and suffering is an ancient one, and many resolutions have been proposed. According to Richardson, these may be divided into four types:

- 1 *Evil as Non-being.* The "perennial philosophy" from Plato through Neoplatonism to Thomas Aquinas held that evil was non-being. God is *ens realissimum*, the source of all perfection. . . . Evil is nothing in itself; it represents only an absence of good. . . .
- 2 *Dualism.* . . . Another explanation is given by dualistic or pluralistic philosophies, which in some way limit the omnipotence of God. Zoroastrianism in ancient Persia envisaged the world as the scene of a struggle between light and darkness, good and evil. . . .
- 3 *Despotism.* . . . If God is God, how can we dispute his wisdom in making things as they are? . . . there can be no such thing as a problem of evil: "whatever is is right" because God wills it. . . .
- 4 *The Moral Theory.* . . . God in creating mankind . . . desired to bring into existence beings who could freely choose the true, the beautiful and the good, and above all who could freely return the love which he had lavished upon them. The creation of a world in which this end was possible necessarily involved three things, which together constitute the problem of evil: (a) pain; (b) suffering, and (c) moral evil.<sup>41</sup>

Williams' understanding has affinities with the first category outlined above, although there are subtle differences. It is significant

that he entitles his discussion of the myth of the Fall, "The Myth of the Alteration of Knowledge". The temptation faced by the Adam (his term for the perfectly united human couple) was:

merely to find out what the good would be like if a contradiction were introduced into it. . . . 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.<sup>42</sup>

God had not changed; the goodness of what God had done had not changed - neither is a serious possibility. Humanity had changed, had insisted on perceiving good as evil - a choice made by each member of the human race. What is humanly perceived as evil is, therefore, the goodness of God at work. Even sin can find a place in the scheme of salvation. In his own personal notes on the Arthurian cycle Williams makes the following observation on Garlon, the knight who wounds King Pelles with the Dolorous Blow, and on the final destructive clash between Arthur and Mordred in which they and the kingdom are destroyed:

In the shape of a little viper, Garlon, the Invisible Knight - *who is Satan to us but the Holy Ghost to the supernatural powers* - provokes the last battle.<sup>43</sup> (emphasis added).

If this bold assertion only appeared in note form, it might be no more than an idea the author speculated about and rejected. However, this understanding makes sense of some of the puzzling emblematic figures to be found in his plays. All of his mature plays contain one of these figures, and there is a strong line of continuity between them. One of the most striking occurs in *Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury*, which Williams wrote for the Canterbury Festival of 1936, the year after T. S. Eliot had given

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*Murder in the Cathedral*. The symbolic character here, the *Figura Rerum*, is a Skeleton. This means that, whatever deeper conclusions the audience may come to, the Skeleton's initial and continuing visual impact is of decay, destruction and death. At first his words and actions are consistent with such an understanding, as he mocks the righteous Cranmer, and declares:

... I only am the pit where Gehenna is sprung<sup>44</sup>

But, almost immediately after this, he is making it clear that he embodies a more subtle purpose:

.... I am the way,  
I the division, the derision, where  
the bones dance in the darkening air  
I at the cross-ways the voice of the one way,  
crying from the tomb of the earth where I died  
the word of the only right Suicide,  
the only word no words can quell,  
the way to heaven and the way to hell.<sup>45</sup>

From Cranmer's view point the Skeleton may well seem evil, as so much of value - finally even Cranmer's integrity - is destroyed. Yet, what appears to be Satan, finally proves to be the Holy Ghost. When the Archbishop is imprisoned by Queen Mary, he cries out:

CRANMER: Did I sin in my mother's womb that I was forsaken  
all my life ? where is my God ?

SKELETON: Where is your God?

(After a pause)

When you have lost him at last you shall come into God.<sup>46</sup>

This is the destruction of all false images of God, of which the *Via Negativa* speaks; the divine cleansing which we all shun, but which we all need. W. H. Auden summarizes the work of the Skeleton:

As a messenger and agent of God, he has certain affinities with the Satan of the book of Job; he can read men's hearts, he understands their weaknesses and self-deceptions, and is permitted to put them

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to tests which they may well fail; he represents, that is to say, that aspect of the Divine activity we have in mind when, in the Lord's Prayer, we pray: lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. He is also, in a sense, the voice of the Holy Spirit, of the truth which forces upon our attention the reality which, as Eliot says, we cannot bear very much of. For that reason, too, the silence of the void, the dark night of the soul, when everything in which we have trusted fails, the experience which, the Gospels tell us, even Christ had to endure.<sup>47</sup>

It is not only "in a sense" that the Skeleton speaks as the Holy Spirit.

The workings of God may seem ironic from a human viewpoint, but they remain divine. Thus it is that the Skeleton can describe himself as:

I am the Judas who betrays men to God.<sup>48</sup>

But the fullest description of the work of the Skeleton comes as

Cranmer waits to be taken to the stake:

Thomas, all your life you have sought Christ  
in images, through deflections; how else can man see ?  
Plastic you sought integrity, and timid courage.  
Most men, being dishonest, seek dishonesty;  
you, among few, honesty, such as you knew,  
in corners of sin, round curves of deception;  
honesty, the point where only the blessed live,  
where only saints settle, the point of conformity.  
Mine is the diagram; I twirl it to a point,  
the point of conformity, of Christ. You shall see Christ,  
see his back first - I am his back.<sup>49</sup>

This suggests that Cranmer has found salvation "in corners of sin" - it is through his sin, not despite it, that he has been saved. The Judas, the Satan, has turned out to be Christ's back. Cranmer's cowardice, his overweening love of words, have both obscured his view of God, and finally lead him to God. The web is complete - when he thought he was moving towards God he was moving away, when he realized his distance he was

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brought close. This paradoxical view of the relationship between sin and salvation has echoes of the famous saying of Dame Julian of Norwich:

Sin is behoveley, but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well<sup>50</sup>.

that is, sin is necessary. It is not just an accident that needs to be rectified, but is an integral part of the Divine Purpose:

that in the dispensation of the fulness of times (God) might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.<sup>51</sup>

Such a view could be taken as justification for the bold claim:

We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.<sup>52</sup>

All things work together, all things will be gathered together. Nothing is superfluous, nothing can be lost - not even that which, at first sight, appeared evil.

In the Arthurian poems, Williams often returns to the web as an image of the working of God, and of the relationship which holds people together. This web lays down duties and responsibilities, and yet it is not onerous:

manacled by the web, in the web made free;  
there was no capable song for the joy in me:<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, so complex is the weaving of this web, that any step away from the centre may yet prove to be part of the path leading to the heart of the design. The lines just quoted come from the last poem in *Taliessin Through Logres*, which describes the final healing of all that has been injured - Arthur reconciled with Lancelot, Guinevere to Blanchefleur - in a celebration of the Mass. It is surely significant that at the service:

the unseen knight of terror stood as a friend; <sup>54</sup>

The forces of destruction have been revealed as the agents of wholeness.

Such a vision is powerful and provocative. It is fair to ask, to what extent did Williams himself live out this understanding? One method of answering this would be the biographical - the examination of the writer's life, and the way in which he responded to the problems and temptations he had to face. Another would be literary - how far did he give this perception imaginative life in his creative writings? The latter course is the one which will be pursued here, and Williams' novels will be examined individually, in the light of the issues already discussed.

Footnotes:

1. R. A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians*, Aquarian Press, 1983, pg. 87
2. Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* is quoted in *The Passion of Christ*, O.U.P. 1939, pg. 27 et al. The two writers were exact contemporaries, both being born in 1886.
3. Williams was among the first English people to read Kierkegaard, and it was due to his recommendation that the O.U.P. began the task of translating and publishing the Danish philosopher's work. See A. M. Hadfield, *Charles Williams: an Exploration of his Life and Work*, O.U.P. 1983, pgs. 123-125
4. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Second Edition edited by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, O.U.P. 1984, pg. 925
5. R. C. Moberly, *Atonement and Personality*, John Murray, 1901, pg. xii
6. Ibid. pg. 118
7. Ibid. pg. 122
8. Ibid. pg. 124
9. Ibid. pg. 39
10. Ibid. pg. 151
11. Ibid. pg. 252
12. Ibid. pg. 119
13. reprinted in *The Image of the City*, OUP, 1958, pgs. 167, 168
14. Ibid. pgs. 147 ff
15. Ibid. pg. 147
16. Ibid. pg. 149, but see also "Bors to Elayne: on the King's Coins" in *Taliessin Through Logres*, O.U.P. 1938, pgs. 42 ff
17. *He Came Down From Heaven*, Heinemann, 1938, pg. 121
18. *The Paradise of the Fathers*, Sir Wallis Budge, quoted in *The Image of the City*, pg. 151
19. Williams used the phrase, "He must become, as it were, a double man", as the epigram for the sixth of his sentences for the Companions of the Co-Inherence. See Appendix C, pg. 148
20. Quoted by E. Browett, in conversation with H. Mordecai



21. *He Came Down From Heaven*, pg. 124
22. *Descent Into Hell*, Faber, 1937, reprinted Eerdmans 1977, pgs. 96-104, 168-172. All references are to the Eerdmans edition.
23. I have received letters from people who knew Williams, describing their own positive experiences of substitution.
24. *The Figure of Beatrice: a study in Dante*, Faber, 1943, footnote to pg. 92
25. G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, Heinemann, 1936, pg. 298
26. The first explicit statement of such an exchange probably does not occur until the statement on the relationship between the two natures of Christ issued by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A. D.
27. C. F. D. Moule, "Colossians and Philemon", in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1962, pg. 991
28. *Atonement and Personality*, pg. xii
29. *He Came Down From Heaven*, pg. 121
30. *The Region of the Summer Stars*, Editions Poetry London, 1944, "The Meditation of Mordred" p. 48
31. Ibid. p. 47
32. Ibid. p. 49
33. e.g. *He Came Down From Heaven*, pg. 16
34. *Taliessin through Logres*, "The Star of Percivale" p. 47
35. Dante, *De Monarchia*, I, iii, quoted in the preface to *Taliessin Through Logres*.
36. There are few references to final destruction in Williams. In *Descent into Hell*, there is a man who has committed suicide - an action which might be seen as the final rejection of co-inherence - who is yet drawn back by the unwitting intercessions of others. Although Williams rejected universalism formally, because it had been declared a heresy, he was clearly attracted by the idea. See *The Descent of the Dove*, Longmans, 1939, pg. 40. The relevant passage is quoted below, fn. 35, pg. 126
37. *Taliessin through Logres*, "Taliessin at Lancelot's Mass" p. 90
38. *The Region of the Summer Stars*, "The Prayers of the Pope" p. 59
39. Ibid. p. 60
40. Ibid. p. 60

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41. Alan Richardson, "Evil, the Problem of", *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, SCM Press, 1983, pgs. 193-195
42. *He Came Down From Heaven*, pgs. 18.19
43. *The Image of the City*, "Notes on the Arthurian Myth" pg.178
44. *Collected Plays*, O. U. P. 1963, *Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury* pg.11
45. Ibid. pg.12
46. Ibid. pg.52
47. W. H. Auden, *Secondary Worlds*, Faber & Faber, 1968, pg.32
48. *Cranmer* pg.35
49. Ibid. pg.53
50. *Revelations of Divine Love*, Julian of Norwich, ch. 27, Penguin Books 1966, pg. 103
51. *Ephesians* ch.1 v.10
52. *Romans* ch.8 v.28
53. *Taliessin Through Logres*, "Taliessin at Lancelot's Mass", pg. 91
54. Ibid. pg. 90

### 3.1 Shadows of Ecstasy<sup>1</sup>

The belief that evil is "good known as antagonism" is not an easy one to embody in a work of fiction, and Williams' first attempt to do so was not an unqualified success. "The least of the novels"<sup>2</sup>, full of "difficulties" which "we stumble over"<sup>3</sup> - these are only two representative judgments of *Shadows of Ecstasy*. Even the most sympathetic criticism admits that this novel: "may well be Charles Williams' most undervalued work; without question it is one of his most problematic"<sup>4</sup>.

This is to a large extent because, more than any of Williams' other novels, *Shadows of Ecstasy* is dominated by a single figure: Nigel Considine. He appears within the first three pages, and from then on his presence is felt in every situation, whether he is physically there or not. Every movement in the plot is either a result of, or a reaction to, his planning (in the main, the former). Even when he is dead, his effect on the other characters does not diminish - the novel closes with Roger Ingram brooding on the possibility that Considine may yet return. No other character approaches him in importance. Although many others oppose him, or disagree with him, none of them makes such an emotional impact upon the reader. Indeed as the plot moves to its resolution, throughout the final quarter of the novel other voices become less impressive, rather than more forceful.

Accordingly, the problem of how to judge *Shadows of Ecstasy* is largely the problem of how to judge Considine. How does Williams want his readers to react to his creation - how does Williams himself react, and is there a difference between these two responses? If Considine's actions are listed

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a verdict seems simple - he is the villain of the piece. He sets himself up as "the High Executive"<sup>5</sup>, as whom he has Christian missionaries martyred<sup>6</sup>, and orders London invaded by Africans<sup>7</sup>; he hypnotizes a Zulu king<sup>8</sup> and when that control has been broken persuades the king to suicide<sup>9</sup>; he is directly opposed by the official representative of the Christian faith, Caithness, the priest<sup>10</sup>. Could anyone do all this without being evil? If such a verdict could stand unqualified, *Shadows of Ecstasy* would be a much simpler novel, far easier to assess, than it actually is. For, despite his actions, the response Considine evokes from the other characters places him in a more favourable light than has been suggested so far.

The novel opens with Roger Ingram making an after-dinner speech which he concludes with a ringing quotation from *Measure for Measure*:

I will encounter darkness as a bride,  
And hug it in mine arms.<sup>11</sup>

Ingram is the Professor of Applied Literature ("art as related to action"<sup>12</sup>) and it is clear that he is frustrated because the majority of those present do not respond to the poetry. The speech was seconding a vote of thanks to the guest of honour, an eminent explorer, of whom Roger mutters angrily:

He isn't worth Macaulay and I gave him Shakespeare.<sup>13</sup>

Great poetry is a vital force for Ingram, in a way that sets him apart from other people. That is, until he meets Considine:

[Ingram] was waiting a little impatiently for his things when a voice behind him spoke, "And with what passion, Mr. Ingram," it said, "do you yourself encounter darkness?"

Roger turned and saw Nigel Considine. . . . He saw a man of apparently about fifty, tall, well-proportioned, clean-shaven, with a good forehead and a good chin. But it was neither forehead or chin that held Ingram; it was the eyes. He thought of the word

"Smouldering," and almost as quickly cursed himself for thinking of it; it was such a hateful word, only it was the most accurate. Something, repressed and controlled but vivid, was living in them; they corresponded, in their flickering intensity, to a voice that vibrated with some similar controlled ardour. The word "darkness" as it was uttered called to him as it did in the lines he had quoted; he felt as if he were looking at the thing itself. He began to speak, stammered on a syllable, and at last said helplessly: "I ? darkness ?"

"You spoke of it familiarly," the other said. "You used her language."

Roger pulled himself together; he answered with a slight hostility. "If you mean my one Shakespearean quotation - "

"Isn't that just darkness making itself known ?" Considine asked. "Or do you use apposite quotation as a social convenience ?"

Roger felt ridiculously helpless, as if a believer accustomed to infidels were suddenly confronted by a fanatic of his own creed. But the implied sneer stung him, and he said sharply, "I don't quote."

"I believe that - because of your voice," the other answered. "You must forgive me if I was offensive; could I help wondering if you really made that rapturous cry your own ?"<sup>14</sup>

Despite the somewhat clichéd description - "a good forehead and a good chin", "smouldering" eyes with "flickering intensity" - this exchange establishes Considine as a character worthy of respect, mainly because of the way in which it disorients Ingram. Nothing in the novel suggests his love for poetry is anything other than good (quite apart from the parallels in many of Williams' other works which would indicate that, in this respect, Ingram is a spokesman for the author himself<sup>15</sup>). And yet he finds himself in a situation which will be paralleled by Damaris Tighe in *The Place of the Lion* - he is shocked to find that in the subject he knows, that he believes he has insight into, there is a depth, maybe even a reality, beyond anything he has imagined. Unlike Damaris, however, he adapts to the new perspective quickly. The next time he meets Considine, Ingram admits:

I embalm poetry there - with the most popular and best-smelling unguents and so on, but I embalm it alright. I then exhibit the embalmed body to visitors at so much a head. They like it much better than the real thing, and I live by it, so I suppose it's alright. No doubt the embalmers of Egypt were pleasant enough creatures. They weren't called to any nonsense of following a pillar of fire between the piled waters of the Nile.<sup>16</sup>

Considine has made a convert. He is the "pillar of fire" which Ingram begins to follow.

Ingram's decision is significant, for he is the character with whom the reader is asked to identify; his reaction to events and people, whether good or bad, guides the reader response. In fact, Carpenter has noted various parallels with Williams himself:

[Ingram] was recognizable as bearing a superficial resemblance to Williams himself<sup>17</sup>

and:

[*Shadows of Ecstasy*] is also the most autobiographical [of Williams' novels]; for what Considine teaches Ingram - that the emotions can be turned inwards to strengthen the personality - was what Williams now believed.<sup>18</sup>

A line often used by by Ingram:

And thus the Filial Godhead answering spake<sup>19</sup>

was a favourite of Williams also:

in [his lectures] he chanted lines of verse almost as if they were magical formulae. They were not always lines that made any great sense out of context - "And thus the Filial Godhead answering spake" from *Paradise Lost* and "Felt in the blood and along the heart" from Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" were among his favourites - but he did not believe that the actual meaning of such lines was especially important. "There has been a great deal too much talking of what the poets *mean*," he wrote in *The English Poetic Mind*. And in another context he said: "It isn't what poetry says, it is what poetry *is*." What poetry was to him was a storehouse of emotional or even supernatural power. He believed he could come into contact with that power by chanting lines of great verse. Like Roger Ingram in *Shadows of Ecstasy* he "submitted his obedience to the authority of Milton

and Wordsworth, waiting for the august plenitude of their poetry to be manifested within him".<sup>20</sup>

Carpenter may go too far in such an exact identification between creator and creation; indeed, part of the task of this thesis is to argue for greater caution in defining Williams' own attitude to the supernatural. Yet there is one aspect where the historical and fictional characters overlap definitely - they both have a great liking for tea.<sup>21</sup>

There can be no doubt of Ingram's respect and admiration for Considine - an attitude which increase the latter's stature. In much the same way, when other characters oppose him, their opposition is such that it enhances Considine, rather than diminishing him. The two characters who dislike and distrust him instinctively are Ingram's sister-in-law, Rosamond, and the priest, Caithness, both of whom are shown to be morally flawed. Rosamond is greedy and superficial, afraid to be honest about her own desires, even to herself. As a child she had pretended to dislike chocolates, until she made herself sick by gorging an entire box - an action which she tried to blame on her sister, Isabel<sup>22</sup>. As an adult her self-control has grown, as has her capacity for self-deception:

She had cheated herself so long, consciously in childhood, with that strange combination of perfect innocence which makes childhood so blameless and so guilty at one and the same moment; less consciously in youth as innocence faded and the necessity of imposing some kind of image of herself on the world grew stronger, till now in her first womanhood she had forgotten the cheat, until her outraged flesh rebelled and clamoured from starvation for food. And even now she would not admit it; she would neither fight it nor flee from it nor yield to it nor compromise with it. She could hardly even deny that it was there, for there was no place for it in her mind. She, she of all people, could never be capable of abominably longing to be near the dark prince of Africa; she couldn't thrill to the trumpets of conversion nor glow to 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 Philip, all of Philip, for Philip to her agonized sense

was at once a detestable parody of what she wanted, and a present reminder of what she longed to forget.<sup>23</sup>

Her reaction makes clear the sexual element which is part of Considine's attraction, but he is not discredited thereby. Not only does Rosamund hate the self-proclaimed High Executive, but also "Roger's verse and Philip, all of Philip" (Philip being her fiancé) both of which, the novel upholds as good things which ought to be loved and respected, rather than hated. If she is wrong to reject them, the implication is that she is wrong to reject Considine also. She is starving herself deliberately; all that she is denying, including Considine, would be food to her.

Caithness, also, operates within very clear limits. He has his own view of the world, to which everything else must conform:

He took life seriously, and (as often happens) attributed his temperament to his religion. He was therefore not entirely comfortable with other people of different temperaments who did the same thing.<sup>24</sup>

He discourages Philip from expecting too much from the promises of the High Executive in such a way that:

Sir Bernard would no doubt have pointed out, what did not occur to either of the others, that this merely meant that Caithness was substituting his own hobby for Philip's.<sup>25</sup>

Such a rigid attitude means the priest's dismissal of Considine cannot carry weight, for he is unable to conceive of the possibility that the latter might be right in any respect. Caithness' position is further undermined by the part he plays in Considine's downfall. When another of the Adepts, Mottreux, contemplates betraying his leader, Caithness encourages him - despite being aware that the Church should not use secular force to achieve its ends.<sup>26</sup> The cleric is horrified to discover, Mottreux



having shot both Considine and an innocent bystander, that the traitor was motivated by greed, rather than higher motives. Yet within fifteen lines of prose he has reached the comfortable conclusion that: "Out of evil, God brought forth good"<sup>27</sup>. This is not presented as a deep moral insight. Rather, Caithness has not only resolved a dilemma in a distinctly dubious manner, but also he has used religious phraseology to stifle any sense of moral responsibility he may, fleetingly, have had.

Caithness' limited moral vision is related to a deliberately circumscribed view of God:

He defined men by morality; it was perhaps inevitable that he should define God in the same way. The most difficult texts for him to explain away had always been those which obscurely hint at the origin of evil itself in the Unnameable, "the lying spirit" of Zedekiah, the dark question of Isaiah - "Shall there be evil in the city and I the Lord have not done it?" He was always trying to avoid Dualism, and falling back on the statement that Omniscience might permit what it did not and could not originate, yet other origin (outside Omniscience) there be none. It is true he always added that it was a mystery, but a safer line was to insist that good and evil were facts, whatever the explanation was. True as this might be, it had the slight disadvantage that he saw everything in terms of his own good and evil, and so imperceptibly to resist evil rather than to follow good became the chief concern of his exhortations.<sup>28</sup>

This paragraph raises the primary question of this thesis - what was Charles Williams' understanding of the nature of evil? Having asserted in his non-fictional works that evil is good known "as antagonism"<sup>29</sup>, does he demonstrate this perception dramatically in his novels? Caithness clearly does not share such a view - his statement "good and evil were facts" is quietly corrected by "true as this might be", for according to Williams' explicit opinion evil would not be "fact", good being the only "fact". And yet, the novel which raises this issue more clearly than any of the others, also answers it more ambiguously than any other of Williams' novels.

Before any conclusions are drawn about *Shadows of Ecstasy*, one further strand in the presentation of Considine demands comment. Huttar has observed that:

He also strikingly resembles Jesus Christ, except that Christ, in his triumphal entry, accepted the throwing down of palm branches and not the frenzied self-immolation of his followers, and then, though perfectly capable on a different occasion of passing through the midst of a hostile crowd, allowed himself to be arrested. It is, in any case, part of Williams' design that such parallels should be noticed; and part of Considine's as well, for his allusive self-identifications with Christ are frequent and explicit. "I have meat to eat that ye know not of," he says to explain his austere diet (130). He rebukes the disciple who would defend him with weapons (148). He claims to "bring a gospel of redemption" and asks, "Whom do men say that I, a son of man, am?" (208). He asserts, "Because I live, men shall live also," and "do greater works than I".<sup>30</sup>

There are marked resemblances, there are also significant differences.

After Considine has claimed, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of", the quotation is completed:

Isabel said, more suddenly than was her habit, "It was to do the will of Him that sent him."

"What else?" Considine answered. "What else could it be?"

"But you don't claim to be doing that will?" Isabel said. "You're not in obedience, are you?"

"I am in obedience to all laws I have not yet mastered."<sup>31</sup>

His aim is to master even those laws, and then "obedience" would, presumably, be over. One such law is death, which he and his adepts seek to overcome. And so Isabel continues her questioning:

"But those that die may be lordlier than you: they are obedient to defeat. Can you live truly till you have been quite defeated? You talk of living by your hurts, but perhaps you avoid the utter hurt that's destruction."

He smiled down at her. "Why, have it as you will," he said. "But it isn't such submission and destruction that man desires."<sup>32</sup>

Desires? No. Yet the gulf here between Considine and the one who:

humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross<sup>33</sup>

could hardly be more marked.

The theme of obedience has already been raised as Ingram acts on Considine's teaching and meditates on "And thus the Filial Godhead answering spake":

The simple analysis, the union of opposites, which so often existed in verse, was clear enough. There was the opposition of the Latin "Filial" and the English "God," and of the ideas expressed in those words - Filial, implying subordination and obedience; Godhead - authority, finality.<sup>34</sup>

Christ knew "subordination and obedience", Considine does not. He displays the outer marks of Christ, without the inner disposition, and may well deserve the title "Antichrist" that Caithness awards him<sup>35</sup>. Recognizing all this, Huttar claims that Williams intended the reader to make such an identification, wanted her/him to experience the full attraction of Considine, and yet to see that attraction quietly undermined by Isabel, particularly in this area of subordination. Huttar's argument is that Williams' portrayal of Considine parallels his understanding of Milton's handling of Satan in *Paradise Lost*. Referring to an article reprinted in *The Image of the City*, he summarizes:

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By 1937 Williams could write of a "recent" "alteration . . . of our views of Milton - . . . the realization that Milton imagined Satan as silly" (IC 19). Milton "allows, even admires, Satan's real powers and virtues", Williams goes on, but he "insists on seeing all of him" (23). That "all" includes Satan's refusal to acknowledge certain facts: "he never came anywhere near shaking [God's] throne" (24), though his rhetoric would claim so. It also includes the recognition that Satan "is the full example of the self-loving spirit", trying "to lure everyone. . . into the same state of self-love" (30). Because of his self-love, the final verdict on Satan must be: "malicious and idiotic" (31), terms no longer to be dismissed as Miltonic mud-slinging, but taken seriously.<sup>36</sup>

Huttar argues:

[*Shadows of Ecstasy*] is a fully controlled expression of of the author's Christian sensibility, [therefore] we must say that Williams evidently wished to allow the fullest possible scope to the alternative vision - epitomized in Considine's phrase "Second Evolution of Man" (42) - and scrupulously to avoid imposing on the reader a heavy-handed final vindication of his own beliefs. He insists on giving the devil his due, even to the extent that we may wonder, after all, whether he was of the devil's party.<sup>37</sup>

and concludes:

Milton's Satan, said Williams, was the the "proof" that "Milton trusted poetry absolutely" (EP 162). Could Williams, given these principles and this example, do less?<sup>38</sup>

It is a highly attractive view, not least because it sees the author as fully in control of his material at all times. The scope of the present argument does not allow for a detailed and systematic examination of Huttar's case but, if he is correct, then *Shadows of Ecstasy* would display Williams' belief in the vacuity of evil. Evil is self-defeating, with illusion its only force - the same scheme here as elsewhere. And yet, does this really do justice to the emotional atmosphere of the novel? Is Isabel truly a counter-balance to Considine, despite getting the better of their exchanges? Can she be set against the strong sense of his presence, a sense that persists even when he is off-stage? That the answer to these questions must be "No", is suggested by the closing paragraphs of the novel. Even after Ingram has seen Considine killed, even after he has returned to Isabel, his thoughts are preoccupied with the possibility of Considine's victory:

If he came now, humming those last songs which the greatest of poets had made from his own vision of Ariel flying free, smiling at the blindness of extreme pain and the paralysis of extreme possession, guardian of myths and expositor of power. . . if he returned. If

*Shadows of Ecstasy*

now, while the world shouted over the defeat of his allies and subjects, while it drove its terror back into its own unmapped jungles, and subdued its fiercer desires to an alien government of sterile sayings, if now he came once more to threaten and deliver it. If - ah beyond, beyond belief !- but if he returned. . . .<sup>39</sup>

Ingram, it seems, is still captivated by this quasi-messianic vision; he does not recognize anything "silly" about it. Neither, one may suspect, does Williams. Far from recognizing that evil is good known as contradiction, and so rejoicing in good, here there seems to be a delight in power and domination, such as Underhill characterized as typical of magic<sup>40</sup>. Unlike the Skeleton, or Carlon, who are seen as evil initially, but then recognized as agents of God<sup>41</sup>, Considine enjoys the author's approval despite the moral dubiousness of his actions. On the basis of *Shadows of Ecstasy* alone, Leavis may have been right when he claimed that:

Williams' preoccupation with "the horror of evil" is evidence of an arrest at the schoolboy (and -girl) stage, than of spiritual maturity.<sup>42</sup>

Footnotes:

1. Most studies of Williams' novels examine *Shadows of Ecstasy* first, as the original version, known as *The Black Bastard* was written in 1925, although the final novel was not published until 1933. Without the opportunity to study the manuscript of *The Black Bastard* (held in the Marion E. Wade collection at Wheaton College, Illinois) and to compare it with the published version, it seems wise to follow convention, and treat *Shadows of Ecstasy* as the first of Williams' novels, rather than the fifth.
2. Cavaliero, *Charles Williams: Poet of Theology* Macmillan, 1983, pg. 63
3. Howard, *The Novels of Charles Williams*, OUP, 1983, pg. 50
4. Huttar, Charles A. "Williams' Changing Views of Milton and the Problem of *Shadow of Ecstasy*", in *Inklings - Jahrbuch für Literatur und Ästhetik*, Band 5, Verlag H-W Stier, 1987, pg. 223
5. *Shadows of Ecstasy* Gollancz, 1933, reprinted Eerdmans 1978, pg. 86. All references are to the Eerdmans edition.
6. Ibid, pg. 18
7. Ibid, pgs. 145, 152
8. Ibid, pg. 107
9. Ibid, pg. 212
10. Ibid, pg. 207
11. Ibid, pg. 7
12. Ibid, pg. 7
13. Ibid, pg. 8
14. Ibid, pgs. 12, 13
15. See below, pg. 50
16. *Shadows of Ecstasy*, pg. 33
17. Carpenter, *The Inklings*, George Allen & Unwin, 1978, pg. 93
18. Ibid, pg. 94
19. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, vi 722. Quoted by Ingram, *Shadows of Ecstasy*, pgs. 44, 78-9, 204
20. Carpenter, pg. 102. The references are to *Paradise Lost*, vi 722, Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey" 28, Williams, *The English Poetic Mind*, OUP, 1932, pg. vii, *Shadows of Ecstasy*, pgs. 61, 211

21. Carpenter, pg. 114, *Shadows of Ecstasy*, pg. 169
22. *Shadows of Ecstasy*, pg. 63
23. Ibid, pg. 135
24. Ibid, pg. 17
25. Ibid, pg. 49
26. Ibid, pg. 199. On page 18 the Archbishop of Canterbury is reported as denying the Church the use "of secular arms".
27. *Shadows of Ecstasy*, pg. 215
28. Ibid, pg. 196
29. *He Came Down From Heaven*, Heinemann, 1938, pg. 19. See above pg. 38
30. Huttar, pg. 226, where he gives the biblical references: *John* 4.32, 18.11. *Matthew* 16.13, *John* 14.19 and 12
31. *Shadows of Ecstasy*, pg. 130
32. Ibid, pg. 131
33. *Philippians* 2.8
34. *Shadows of Ecstasy*, pg. 78
35. Ibid, pg. 78
36. Huttar, pg. 229. The page references are to *The Image of the City*, OUP, 1958. The article in question appeared in *The London Mercury*, July 1937.
37. Ibid, pg. 228
38. Ibid, pg. 234. The reference is to *The English Poetic Mind*, OUP, 1932
39. *Shadows of Ecstasy*, pg. 224
40. See above, pg. 6
41. See above, pgs. 39-41
42. Leavis, F.R., *The Common Pursuit*, Pelican books, 1978, pg. 253. See above pg. 4

### 3.2 War in Heaven

Not only was it the first of his novels to be published, appearing in 1930, but *War in Heaven* seems to have established itself as the most popular of Charles Williams' works also. In many ways it is more straightforward than the other novels; there is a strong narrative, involving a good deal of action - a valuable treasure is found, is lost, and is found and lost again, before a successful resolution is accomplished. The novel also boasts a highly dramatic opening, firmly in the tradition of the thriller:

The telephone bell was ringing wildly, but without result, since there was no-one in the room but the corpse.'

It also possesses many occult elements which even critics who appreciate Williams have been unhappy about. Cavaliero believes that:

the scenes of black magic have a compelling power that renders the book imaginatively dualistic<sup>2</sup>

while Carpenter, describing the friendship that grew up between Williams and C. S. Lewis after the latter had read *The Place of the Lion*, comments:

Perhaps it was fortunate that it was this book rather than any other of the early novels that formed [Lewis'] introduction to Williams' work. . . . the book lacked any of the unpleasantness which sometimes seemed to be beneath the surface of the black magic and "sexual energy" in *War in Heaven* and *Shadows of Ecstasy*.<sup>3</sup>

All of which would suggest that Lewis' criticism of Williams<sup>4</sup> is as valid for this novel as it had been for *Shadows of Ecstasy*. The purpose of this chapter is to argue that the novelist was using magic with great care, so that it is shown to be unrewarding and insubstantial. Yet there are other issues, relating to Williams' perception of the universe, that need to be discussed before such an argument begins.



Lionel Rackstraw is one of the minor characters in the novel. Events happen around him, rather than to him: a man is murdered in his office, his wife is driven mad by a strange drug, his son is kidnapped to be used as a sacrifice. And yet he is important, because of his reactions to these events. To call him a pessimist, is to use too mild a word; he sees the world as a place of darkness and horror. When he returns home, having discovered a corpse in his room:

His usual 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 were ever late for an appointment - this sense now escaped from his keeping, and, instead of being hidden, became too universal to be seized. . . . It occurred to him even as he smiled at Barbara that perhaps another lover had not long left the house; it occurred to him even as he watched Adrian finding pictures of trains in the evening paper that a wild possibility - for a story perhaps; not, surely not, as truth - might be that of a child whose brain was that of a normal man of forty while all his appearance was that of four. An infant prodigy? No, but a prodigy who for some horrible reason of his own concealed his prodigiousness until the moment he expected should arrive. And when they left him to his evening meal, while Barbara engaged herself in putting Adrian to bed, a hundred memories of historical or fictitious crimes entered his mind in which the victim had been carefully poisoned under the shelter of a peaceful and happy domesticity. And not that alone or chiefly; it was not only the possibility of administered poison that occupied him, but the question whether all food, and all other things also, were not in themselves poisonous. Fruit, he thought, might be; was there not in the nature of things some venom which nourished while it tormented, so that the very air he breathed did but enable him to endure for a longer time the spiritual malevolence of the world?<sup>s</sup>

This bleakness will be contrasted with the Archdeacon's repeated assertion of the goodness of God: "For His mercy endureth for ever", and yet it seems that this was a bleakness that Williams himself experienced.

In February 1930 (the year in which *War* was published) he wrote a version of the Lord's Prayer for a friend who had abandoned formal

religion. The clause: "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" was reinterpreted as:

lead me not any hour into temptation, but deliver me from evil, this thou canst and this thou dost, from treachery, from treachery, from all lust of self;<sup>6</sup>

This dwelling on the possibility of being betrayed, as much by himself as by any external events, is the echo of Rackstraw's fears. Indeed, that same friend was to confirm that:

He [i.e. Williams] is Rackstraw with wife and child, and job in OUP (that's his desk, and the back way out is the way we would go out to Ludgate Hill to lunch). And the cottage lent by a friend in the country house grounds. That is Charles' despair - he is also Mornington and the Duke, exploring poetry and aspects of Christianity.<sup>7</sup>

And yet this despair serves Rackstraw as a sort of armour. Gregory Persimmons is a malicious character who delights in tormenting others. Before the novel opens, he has driven his father and his wife mad, he may well do the same to his son, and he succeeds in stirring Mornington into an irrational fury<sup>8</sup>. While Barbara Rackstraw remains in the grip of delirium, Persimmons intends to amuse himself playing with Lionel. His games do not work, indeed he is shaken by what Lionel has to say, rather than the reverse:

"But," [Persimmons] said doubtfully, "had Judas himself no delight? There is an old story that there is rapture in the worship of treachery and malice and cruelty and sin."

"Pooh," Lionel said contemptuously; "it is the ordinary religion disguised; it is the church-going clerk's religion. Satanism is the clerk at the brothel. Audacious little middle-class cock-sparrow!"

"You are talking wildly," Gregory said a little angrily. "I have met people who have made me sure that there is a rapture of iniquity."

"There is a rapture of anything, if you come to that," Lionel answered; "drink or gambling or poetry or love or (I suppose) satanism. But the one certainty is that the traitor is always and everywhere present in evil and good alike, and all is horrible in the end."

. . . . Gregory was suddenly conscious that he felt a trifle sick.<sup>9</sup>

It is not altogether clear how the reader is intended to respond to such despair. The fact that it is placed in clear opposition to Persimmon's sadism lends it validity - it is a legitimate viewpoint, even if it is incomplete. And yet the shape of the plot testifies to a beneficent Providence working with even the most adverse circumstances, rather than to "the traitor . . . always and everywhere present". There is a definite tension here - a tension also found in *Romans* between:

there is none that doeth good, no, not one (2.12)

which Rackstraw quotes<sup>10</sup>, and:

all things work together for good to them that love God (8.28)

which emerges as the conscious theme of the novel, expressed through both its structure, and characters such as the Archdeacon. The Archdeacon, indeed, remarks:

No-one can possibly do more than decide what to believe.<sup>11</sup>

Williams, it would seem, had decided to believe that "all things work together", and yet he also lived with the fear:

that in me . . . dwelleth no good thing (*Romans* 7.18).

It was a tension to which he would often return in the future, particularly in his literary criticism<sup>12</sup>, and his poetry<sup>13</sup>.

Within this novel, the author does attempt to reconcile these viewpoints. In the final chapter Rackstraw meets Prester John, who acts as the *deus ex machina*. The latter speaks of "a happy ruin and a fortunate despair", and continues:

"I bring the desire of all men, and what will you ask of me?"

"Annihilation," Lionel answered. "I have not asked for life, and I should be content now to know that soon I should not be. Do you think I desire the heaven they talk of?"

"Death you shall have at least," the other said. "But God only gives, and He only has Himself to give, and He, even He, can give it only on those conditions which are Himself. Wait but a few years, and He shall give you the death you desire. But do not grudge too much if you find that death and desire are one." He pointed towards Cully. "This man [Persimmons] desired greatly the God of all sacrifice and sacrifice itself, and he finds Him now. But you shall find another way, for the door that opens on annihilation opens only on the annihilation which is God."<sup>14</sup>

There is a clear connection here with characters in later works, particularly the Skeleton in *Cranmer*, and the Accuser in *Judgement at Chelmsford*. However those works were written after *War in Heaven* (1936 and 1939 respectively), and both spend time working out the connections between the loss of all things and the finding of all things, between annihilation and God. Here, such a reconciliation is asserted, rather than demonstrated, and does not have enough dramatic force to carry conviction. Rackstraw's conversation with Persimmons was to be echoed in the Skeleton's assertion:

I am the Judas who betrays men to God.<sup>15</sup>

but the emotional force of that conversation, the strength of feeling behind the perception:

The whole scheme of things is malign and omnipotent. That is the way they work.<sup>16</sup>

is not answered with any direct reply of like power.

Indeed, it is only the figure of Prester John who attempts to reply and he is a weak character dramatically. The mystery surrounding his identity, the regal and sacerdotal associations evoked when that identity is revealed, these are used effectively. However, the wide range of problems with which he deals, coupled with his late arrival in the narrative, serve to undermine his credibility. He enables Inspector Colquhoun to solve the murder, he saves the Archdeacon from the torment imposed on him, he rescues the Graal, and restores it finally to its proper place. However well these are described (and many of them are, particularly the final Eucharist), Prester John does too much in too short a time. Was there any need for anybody else to work or pray for the Graal's safety, if the Lord of the Graal could preserve it so easily? Williams is attempting, through this character, to reconcile apparently contradictory world-views, to discover an intellectual co-inherence, but he has not yet found an appropriate vehicle to make this work.

Recognizing that two opposing views of the nature of the universe - beneficent and maleficent - exist unreconciled in the novel, what light do they shed on the occult elements which *War in Heaven* contains? Rackstraw is the mouthpiece of the latter understanding, and his opinion has been quoted already:

Satanism is the clerk at the brothel,<sup>9</sup>

while the Archdeacon speaks for the former, and declares:

The Black Mass is all nonsense, of course . . . but nonsense, after all, does exist. And minds can get drunk with nonsense.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the aid he gives Persimmons, Sir Giles Tumulty is as cynically dismissive of the occult experiments as of any other activity in the novel. When he gives Persimmons the address from which he can obtain the ointment for the Sabbath he observes:

It's in the middle classes one finds these things easiest. The lower classes haven't got the money or the time or the intelligence, and the upper classes haven't got the power or the intelligence.<sup>19</sup>

Later, when Persimmons talks with longing of using the Graal as a gate through which to offer up Adrian's soul:

"You do talk pretty, Persimmons," Sir Giles said. "You believe that this damn Graal is more use than that coffee-cup?"<sup>19</sup>

Gregory Persimmons is the closest thing to the traditional image of a black magician, using ointments and incantations, to be found in the novel, yet he receives no support in his activity from any other character. Even those who work with him - the Greek, Dmitri, and the Jew, Manasseh<sup>20</sup> - pour scorn on his desire to use the power of the Graal, and force him to change his aims:

"Because it has power," the Jew answered, leaning over the counter and whispering fiercely, "it must be destroyed. Don't you understand that yet? They build and we destroy. That's what levels us; that's what stops them. One day we shall destroy the world. What can you do with it that is so good as that? Are we babies to look to see what will happen to-morrow or where a lost treasure is or whether a man has a gluttonous heart?"

. . . . Then the Greek said, looking past them, "It is all one; in the end it is all one. You do not believe each other and neither of you will believe me. But in the end there is nothing at all but you and that which goes by. You will be sick at heart because there is nothing, nothing but a passing, and in the midst of the passing a weariness that is you. All things shall grow fainter, all desire cease in that sickness and the void that is about it."<sup>21</sup>

Carpenter and Cavaliero have commented on the compulsion associated with the scenes of black magic, but these scenes evoke a desire that is never fulfilled. Persimmon's internal Sabbath is compelling while it lasts, but it impossible to imagine the Greek and the Jew approving, far less participating, in what turns out to be insubstantial:

He desired - the heat about his heart grew stronger - to give himself out, to be one with something that should submit to him and from which he should draw nourishment; but something beyond imagination, stupendous. He was hungry - but not for food; he was thirsty - but not for drink; he was filled with passion - but not for flesh. He expanded in the rush of an ancient desire; he longed to be married to the whole universe for a bride.<sup>22</sup>

[Persimmons] shrank from the face of the sorcerer; like the Duke he found himself in a state for which he had not been prepared and at which he trembled in horror. A sickness crept within him; was this the end of victory and lordship and the Sabbath, and this the consummation of the promises and of desire?<sup>23</sup>

The consistent verdict of the novel on black magic is petty illusion - offering much, but never satisfying.

By contrast, the novel reaches its climax in which everything is satisfied, in the final Eucharist celebrated by Prester John. Neither the weakness of his character, nor his words, are significant now, it is the movement of the Communion Service which sums up, and heals, all. The importance of the Graal is not in any power it might contain of itself, but in pointing to the Eucharist which, in turn, celebrates the Incarnation. God with his people - "not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by taking of the manhood into God" according to the definition of the Athanasian creed<sup>24</sup>. This particular celebration focuses on humanity made in the image of God, with the repetition of the words of the Lesson:

And God said: Let us make man, in Our image, after our likeness . . . in the image of God created He him, male and female created He them.<sup>25</sup>

and on the praise due to God, as phrases of the liturgy are highlighted:

. . . in a higher and more tremendous summons, "Let us give thanks unto the Lord," and, amid the tumult of song that broke out, Lionel's own voice joining in the answer, "It is meet and right so to do."<sup>26</sup>

If there is a healing for Lionel anywhere, it is in the sacramental action, rather than in words of theological discourse, as he begins to live out "the chief end of man" (according to the Shorter Catechism): "To glorify God and to enjoy him for ever" - an action long embodied by the Archdeacon.

All things are brought together in this service. The Duke, as a Roman Catholic, has had denominational disagreements with his Anglican companions<sup>27</sup>, and will not enter the building "rather more than obedient to the strict etiquette of his Church"<sup>28</sup>. Yet he is drawn in, as he hears the words in Latin - even though the liturgical order is Anglican<sup>29</sup>. Not only he, but his forbears and many others:

He had caught sight of the faces which he knew in the great gallery of his ancestors in the Castle, and other faces more antique and foreign than these, a turbaned head, a helmed and armoured shape, outlandish robes, and the glint of many crowns.<sup>30</sup>

This co-inherence of the present with the past, the local with the distant, is used elsewhere in Williams' writings<sup>31</sup>, but he would have considered it particularly appropriate that this should be seen in the Mass. He believed deeply that there was only one celebration, only one offering, which was re-echoed throughout time and space. As he wrote to Hadfield:

I think the Sacrament is more than images; how and after what mode is another matter. I think the elements are drawn into him at the moment of flesh - death - resurrection. The method of union is obscure enough, and I'm a little inclined to agree that if there is nothing but He there, there is hardly a sacrament . . . I genuflect and adore the Presence, because it seems to me consistent with the general movement that he should so have withdrawn creation into him. On the other hand, I am shy of arguments; the Rite which culminates



in an adorable Mystery of co-inherence will serve for me!<sup>32</sup>

Later Williams was to conclude *Taliessin Through Logres* with a Mass that speaks of healing<sup>33</sup>, and some of those details are foreshadowed. Then there will be a movement of exchange:

singly seen in the Mass, owning the double Crown,  
going to the altar Pelles, and Arthur moving down<sup>34</sup>

and so it is here, between young and old:

[The Archdeacon] smiled at them, and made a motion of farewell with his hand; then he turned and went up to the sanctuary. At the same time Adrian, as if in obedience to some command, scrambled to his feet and came down towards his mother. At the gate of the sanctuary the two met; the child paused and raised his face; gravely they exchanged the kiss of peace. Before Adrian had reached Barbara the other began to mount the steps of the altar, and as he set his foot on the first sank gently to the ground.<sup>35</sup>

The Archdeacon dies, but it is clear that death is no defeat for him, rather he is taken home with the Graal. In fact that is an inference from the fact that he dies in the Communion, but a sure one. Mornington died, having been given the promise by Prester John: "Tonight thou shalt be with Me in Paradise"<sup>36</sup>, and such is the emotional atmosphere surrounding the service that the reader feels more confident of that promise applying to the Archdeacon.

It seems that the Eucharist, far more than any occult rituals lay at the heart of Williams' imaginative, as well as spiritual, life. In the sacrament of the Church he found an existing symbol that spoke of the co-inherence he wanted to express. In *War in Heaven* his own creations are not sufficiently developed to sustain that theme. It remains to be seen whether he succeeds in his later novels.

Footnotes:

1. *War in Heaven*, Gollancz, 1930, Eerdmans Paperback 1982, pg. 7. All references are to the Eerdmans edition
2. Glen Cavaliero, *Charles Williams - Poet of Theology*, Macmillan, 1983, pg. 69
3. Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings*, George Allen & Unwin, 1978, pg. 98
4. F. R. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit*, Pelican Books, 1978, pg. 253. The relevant passage is quoted above, pg. 4
5. *War in Heaven* pgs. 16-18
6. Quoted in a letter from Thelma Shuttleworth to H. Mordecai, 2nd December 1989
7. Thelma Shuttleworth to H. Mordecai, 2nd February 1990
8. *War in Heaven* pg. 134
9. Ibid pg. 168
10. Ibid pg. 167
11. Ibid pg. 113
12. e.g. in his description of *Troilus and Cressida* in *The English Poetic Mind*, OUP, 1932, particularly pg. 58
13. e.g. in the Palomides poems in *Taliessin through Logres*, OUP, 1938
14. *War in Heaven* pg. 251
15. *Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury* (1936), in *Collected Plays*, OUP, 1963, pg. 35
16. *War in Heaven* pg. 167
17. Ibid pg. 102
18. Ibid pg. 65. Rackstraw sees occult dabbling as a middle-class activity, also (*War in Heaven* pg. 168).
19. Ibid pg. 90, a view which is close to the Archdeacon's (*War in Heaven* pg. 138) although arising from different presuppositions. See above, pgs. 9, 10
20. Williams may be guilty of some anti-semitism here, as were many of his contemporaries, among them Dorothy Sayers and T. S. Eliot. He is using stereotypes, but is drawing them from Paul's categorizing of all enemies of the gospel, particularly *1 Corinthians* 1.22,23:

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness.

While Dmitri exemplifies a philosophical nihilism ("wisdom"), Manasseh seeks active destruction ("a sign").

21. *War in Heaven* pgs. 144, 145
22. *Ibid* pg. 75
23. *Ibid* pg. 217
24. Quoted by the Archdeacon, *War in Heaven* pg. 56
25. *Ibid* pg. 253, *Genesis* 1.26, 27
26. *Ibid* pg. 254
27. *Ibid* pg. 138
28. *Ibid* pg. 252
29. "He looked in vain for the motions of the Confession", *War in Heaven* pg. 253. In the *Book of Common Prayer's* "Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper" the Confession does not come until immediately before the Eucharistic Prayer, rather than at the start of the service, as in the Roman rite.
30. *War in Heaven* pg. 252
31. e.g. in "Mount Badon", *Taliessin through Logres*, pg. 16
32. A. M. Hadfield, *Charles Williams: an Exploration of his Life and Work*, OUP, 1983, pg. 212. The letter (dated 1943) continues:  
At bottom a darkness has always haunted me - as you know, I am a Christian (as far as I am) by compulsion of mind and sense: "I think, not natural".
33. See above, pg. 42
34. "Taliessin at Lancelot's Mass", *Taliessin through Logres*, pg. 89
35. *War in Heaven* pg. 255
36. *Ibid* pg. 203, *St. Luke* 23.43

### 3.3 Many Dimensions

Charles Williams did not set out to write a novel cycle in which he could expound a specific viewpoint. The works contain a natural cohesion, as a result of having been written by one person, over the space of some fifteen years, but they are linked no more closely than that. As a consequence, different issues are highlighted by different novels. It has to be admitted that *Many Dimensions* does not lend itself to an investigation into Williams' understanding of the nature of evil and salvation. It does, however, illustrate some important aspects of the way in which this novelist chose to work, which provide significant background to the main purpose of this thesis.

Several of Williams' novels use an object associated with the occult tradition in establishing the action of the plot. In *Many Dimensions*, this object is a mysterious stone, set in the crown of King Solomon (or "Suleiman ben Daood"<sup>1</sup>), which has been guarded for generations by a dynasty of noble Muslims. Before the novel opens, the stone has been acquired by unscrupulous men, who have no compunction in making use of the powers of the stone for their own selfish ends; the plot, accordingly, is concerned with the restoration of the stone.

Of all the symbols used by Williams, this stone is the most esoteric. The Holy Grail (*War in Heaven*) is well known, having been used by a wide range of writers, of varying quality<sup>2</sup>. The Tarot pack (*The Greater Trumps*) is less accessible, but has always attracted interest, and was used by T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* in 1922 (as was the Grail legend)<sup>3</sup>. Platonic archetypes (*The Place of the Lion*) occur frequently in literature,

particularly in the poetry of the *Metaphysicals*<sup>4</sup>. In each of these cases, the reader brings with her/him some familiarity with the symbols, but this familiarity does not exist in *Many Dimensions*.

There may well be parallels with the legendary Philosopher's Stone, which was associated with Solomon, but that is most widely credited with the power to turn base metals into gold<sup>5</sup>. Williams' stone demonstrates many abilities (transporting people through space, and possibly time, healing, defeating death, and replicating itself indefinitely), but transmutation is not one of them. The closest parallel seems to lie in the works of A. E. Waite, yet even here, the resemblance is not exact. Waite talks of:

. . . a mysterious stone called *Schethiyá* which was originally in the Throne of God - that is to say, it was a precious stone or jewel - and was cast by Him into the abyss, so to form the basis of the world and give birth thereto. One might say otherwise it was like a cubical stone or altar, for its extremity was concealed in the depth, while its surface or summit rose above the chaos. It was the central point in the immensity of the world, the cornerstone, the tried stone, the sure foundation, but also that stone which the builders rejected. The last allocation, however, passes understanding, as by the hypothesis of the legend it was used in the building from the beginning. . . . Jacob called it the House of the Elohim, meaning that the Hypostasis to which this name is attributed transfers her residence from the world above to that which is below. . . . it was held in the hands of David when he desired to contemplate close at hand the glory of his Master. In a sense it fell from heaven, like the stone from the crown of Lucifer, and again it was overturned by the iniquity of man, until Jacob restored it to an upright position. Solomon was also one of those who restored it, and thereon he built the sanctuary. We may not know how to harmonise these references which seem to exhaust all that is said of the stone in the Old Testament, but its connection with other and less fabulous elements belonging to the Zoharic myth of creation resides in the fact that this stone was inscribed with the Divine Name before it was cast into the abyss.<sup>6</sup>

Although there is no mention of the powers listed above, Waite and Williams are clearly thinking of the same stone. Waite links it with the

Creation, while the Hajji (the Keeper of the Stone, from whose care it was taken) describes it as:

the First Matter, from which all things are made - spirits and material things.<sup>7</sup>

and:

it was in the crown of Iblis the Accursed when he fell from heaven, and his fall was not assured until that Stone dropped from his head. For yet again it is told that, when the Merciful One made the worlds, first of all He created the Stone and gave it to the Divine One whom the Jews call Shekinah, and as she gazed upon it the universes arose and had being.<sup>8</sup>

Just as David used the stone "to contemplate . . . the glory of his master", even so Chloe, while touching it, has a vision of Suleiman, and of something far greater than Suleiman<sup>9</sup>, which is identified as "the light of the Shekinah"<sup>10</sup>. According to Waite's understanding of the Zohar:

Elohim is a title of Shekinah . . . in which sense . . . she is called the Mirror of Jehovah.<sup>11</sup>

and one of the titles he records for the stone is "the House of the Elohim". Most important of all is the statement "this stone was inscribed with the Divine Name", for this is one of the first things Williams mentions about the stone, and to which he returns many times:

the letters of the Tetragrammaton . . . are not engraved on the Stone; they are in the centre - they are, in fact, the Stone.<sup>12</sup>

All of these correspondences are, doubtless, impressive to the initiate, but they are unlikely to be known to the general reader. Without the detailed background, it would be easy to assume that this stone is Williams' own creation, and that he has become enmeshed in the complexities of his imagination. Indeed, it is hard to avoid that conclusion when

considering the passages in which the implications of travelling through time are examined<sup>13</sup>. The discussions are convoluted and otiose, however logically correct they may be. Neither plot nor characterization is advanced, and the arguments resemble passages in some of the more sterile forms of "scientifiction", as it was known in the 1930s. In this instance, attributes of the central symbol do not contribute to the narrative as a whole.

Another, more serious, problem inherent in the symbolism Williams chose to use in this novel arises from its religious background. Although a committed Anglican, the novelist does not denigrate Islam, or suggests that it is inferior to Christianity. The Hajji is given some of the best speeches in the book, that ring with a sonorous, incantatory appeal<sup>14</sup>. From childhood, Williams had been trained to be evenhanded, giving due emphasis to both sides of an issue. Carpenter describes the effect his father's training had on the young Charles:

Mr. Williams was not only widely-read but totally undogmatic, teaching his son that there were many sides to every argument, and that it was necessary to understand the elements of reason in the other point of view as well as your own. Though a devout churchman, he encouraged Charles to appreciate the force of atheist rationalism and to admire such men as Voltaire and Thomas Paine. Above all he insisted on accuracy, impressing on his son that one should never defend one's opinions by exaggeration or distortion of the facts. . . . [Charles] learnt to be committed, in his case to Christianity; but he also learnt that the other side may have an equal force of argument. . . . his father had taught him to absorb doubt and disbelief into his beliefs.<sup>15</sup>

It is, therefore, not surprising that the majesty of Islam is upheld here. Indeed Williams refuses to be drawn into making comparisons between religious systems; there is nothing explicitly Christian in *Many Dimensions*. Williams' interpretation of Islam is the only alternative to

the calculating cruelty of Sir Giles Tumulty, the shallow greed of Cecilia Sheldrake, or the political manoeuverings of Mr. Garterr Browne and Lord Birlesmere.

And yet, despite the novelist's best efforts, Islam does not become an attractive possibility. It carries with it imaginative associations that become clearer in the first of Williams' Arthurian collections, *Taliessin through Logres*. Here contrasts with Christianity are made, and there is an account of the conversion and baptism of a Muslim knight, Palomides. Places and organizations are used as multi-layered symbols in these poems, and Williams himself explained

Islam is (a) Theism (b) Manicheanism (sic) (c) heavy morality  
(d) Islam. <sup>16</sup>

That is, the religion had overtones for the poet of a dualism of light and darkness, spirit and matter. In a Manichaeian faith, matter would be something to be overcome, so that spiritual salvation could take place - a denial of Williams' understanding of Co-inherence and Incarnation. This becomes clear in his "Prelude", when he talks about the fall of Byzantium to Islam. Shuttleworth has interpreted this as:

an alien culture denying (a) that God became incarnate, (b) that godhead is in flesh and all matter, (c) a further chance of redemption, Fate will decide. <sup>17</sup>

The poem concludes:

Caucasia fell to the Moslem;  
the mamelukes seized the ancient cornland of Empire.  
Union is breached; the imams stand in Sophia.

25 *Good is God*, the muezzin  
calls, but lost is the light on the hills of Caucasia,  
glory of the Emperor, glory of substantial being. <sup>18</sup>



The same commentator explains:

22-24. No joy or honour now in Caucasia. It is known only to be used or abused. Natural bounty is ravaged by toughs (mamelukes), and the religious leaders (imams) repudiate the Incarnation; dichotomy instead of union in man.

25. Good is God: but to Moslems God was never in-manned, so man cannot be in-Godded.<sup>19</sup>

The ancient invasion, undertaken for political and military reasons as well as religious, has become a symbol of the rejection of the inherent goodness of creation. The cry "Good is God" is ironic for the "glory of substantial being" has been lost. In the poet's mind, without belief in the Incarnation a new dualism replaces the old - Creator and Created are forever divided because transcendence is been asserted to the extent of denying immanence. And Williams believed passionately that the affirmation "This also is Thou" could be made of any thing; balanced always by the warning, "Neither is this Thou". Throughout his works simple physicality can take on deep significance, whether in *War in Heaven* where Rackstraw is pulled back from despair by the touch of his wife's hand<sup>20</sup>, or in *Witchcraft* where:

A hand lighting a cigarette is the explanation of everything; a foot stepping from a train is the rock of all existence.<sup>21</sup>

It is a theme that is repeated many times in the Williams corpus, but not, it seems, in *Many Dimensions*.

Cavaliero, commenting on the stone being the source of creation and the end of human desire, has suggested that Williams is deliberately echoing Biblical language surrounding the Divine Logos, and that this "demonstrates

the centrality of the Incarnation in Williams' theology"<sup>22</sup>. Yet he has to concede that:

in using a religious symbol of this kind he returns to pre-Christian imagery, for the Stone resembles the Logos as understood in the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, rather than the Incarnate Logos of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, all the phrases surrounding the stone - "the Protection", "the Unity", "the Resignation" - are non-anthropomorphic, non-Incarnational, which is appropriate for their Islamic background. We have already observed that the resolution of the novel depends on an act of surrender<sup>23</sup> typical of the Via Negativa. This, too, is appropriate, for there are many similarities between the mystic tradition in Islam and Christianity<sup>24</sup> (the novel is not antagonistic to Christianity in any way). Chloe, who is the agent of the final resolution, is the only character possessing a stone, never to use it. Her employer, Lord Arglay, experiments with travelling through space; she observes him<sup>25</sup>. Her house is burgled, she refuses to protect herself beyond praying, "Do, or do not"<sup>26</sup>. Even when she cooperates with Lord Arglay to free an unwitting victim of Tumulty's experiments (the nearest she comes to making use of the stone), he can observe:

I had an idea, from what you said, that I was doing most of the work.<sup>27</sup>

She finally reunites all the divided types, by allowing the stone to do as it wills; she makes herself a Path for the Stone<sup>28</sup>. As she does so, she comments:

I have nothing at all to do

to which the Hajji responds:

Blessed for ever be the Resignation of the elect.<sup>29</sup>

The *Via Negativa* is firmly within the tradition of apophatic theology, which believes that the most accurate way to describe God is to abandon all comparisons and categories; it may be possible to talk of what God is not, but not of what God is. One of the most consistent exponents of such a view was Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Early in the sixth century he concludes his *Mystical Theology* with:

nor can It be grasped by the understanding, since It is not knowledge or truth; nor is It kingship or wisdom; nor is It one, nor is It unity, nor is It Godhead or Goodness; nor is It a Spirit, as we understand the term, since It is not Sonship or Fatherhood; nor is It any other thing such as we or any other being can have knowledge of; nor does It belong to the category of non-existence or to that of existence. . . nor can any affirmation or negation apply to It.<sup>30</sup>

Williams commented on the passage:

It has been said that this is not the kind of being to whom man can pray; no, but without this revelation there is no sort of thing to whom men can pray, and the orisons of Christendom will be too much circumscribed.<sup>31</sup>

It is an approach for which the novelist had a great respect. It is also a way of expressing the transcendence of God, of which a Muslim would be able to approve, making apophatic thinking an appropriate backdrop for this novel. Yet Williams' imagination and spirituality were firmly in the cataphatic tradition, which involves an appreciation of the names of God found in Scripture, and a valuing of the material world for what it says about its Maker.<sup>32</sup>

In his history of the Church, *The Descent of the Dove*, (1939), Williams praises both the Affirmative and Negative Ways, recognizing that they need to co-inhere, each a safeguard to the dangers of the other. The great document of the former he cites as the Creed of St. Athanasius, of the

latter the *Mystical Theology*<sup>32</sup>. Yet it is surely significant that he can say of the Creed:

it produces a phrase which is the very maxim of the Affirmative Way: "Not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh but by taking of the manhood into God."<sup>34</sup>

a phrase which is repeated in *War in Heaven*<sup>35</sup>, while the Creed as a whole is referred to when he uses poetry to talk of the establishment of the Company of the Co-inherence:

What says the creed of the Trinity ? *quicumque vult;*  
therefore its cult was the Trinity and the Flesh-taking.<sup>36</sup>

He could perceive the worth of both documents, the value of both ways, but it is easy to see his inspiration grew out of the Affirmative Way.

Why Williams should have devoted an entire novel to a subject to which he was emotionally antithetical is unclear. However, it is significant that the background to this subject is not Christian; had it been, it is unlikely that the novelist would have been able to remain within the *Via Negativa*. If the relic had been a fragment of the True Cross, or one of the gifts of the Magi, rather than the stone, many of the strange powers could have remained the same, but the ambience of the novel would have been completely different. His own spiritual awareness was so bound up with Affirmation, that he had to move to a different tradition in order to explore Negation.

The result is, possibly, Williams' least convincing novel. *Shadows of Ecstasy* is also unsuccessful, but that is because the reader's (and maybe the novelist's) sympathies are being engaged in contradictory directions<sup>37</sup>. In *Many Dimensions*, such sympathy is never fully aroused. Consequently, this novel has little to say to the subject of this thesis - Williams'

imaginative perception of evil, and how it is overcome. Yet it may be significant that, even though the language used to describe the stone hints at incantations and rituals, the final restoration does not depend on any complicated apparatus. Chloe submits herself to the stone, under the direction of Lord Arglay. He asks her:

Are you to be the Path for the Stone ?

and the simplicity of her reply:

That is as you will have me be,<sup>39</sup>

may be a deliberate echo of the Virgin's:

be it unto me according to thy word.<sup>39</sup>

The fact that she then spends nine months in a coma (the length of a normal pregnancy) before she dies, may reinforce the parallel<sup>40</sup>.

If this identification is correct then it suggests, once again, that Williams saw reconciliation, or healing, in terms of an open secret. Mary's acceptance of the Divine Will, at the Annunciation, has been a popular church festival since the eighth century at least<sup>41</sup>, rather than an esoteric doctrine. As in *War in Heaven*, the liturgy of the Church accomplishes what occult lore can only dream of.

Footnotes:

1. *Many Dimensions*, Gollancz, 1931, Eerdmans Paperback 1981, pg. 8. All references are to the Eerdmans edition.
2. Among the authors known to Williams who have used the Grail legend are Malory, *The Morte D'Arthur* (1470), Tennyson, *The Idylls of the King* (1842), and Underhill, *The Column of Dust* (1909).
3. "I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience." T.S. Eliot, "Notes on the Wasteland", in *The Wasteland and other Poems*, Faber & Faber, 1940, pg. 44.
4. e.g. John Donne in "Air and Angels". Marvell "On a Drop of Dew"
5. The most obvious literary example of this is Jonson's *The Alchemist*, where the plot depends on the widespread acceptance of this belief.
6. A. E. Waite, *The Secret Doctrine in Israel*, Occult Research Press, 1913, pgs. 62, 63.
7. *Many Dimensions*, pg. 56
8. Ibid, pg. 44
9. Ibid, pgs. 167-9
10. Ibid, pg. 242
11. *The Secret Doctrine in Israel*, pg. 191
12. *Many Dimensions*, pg. 7. See also pg. 26, and pgs. 45 and 261, where the letters of the Tetragrammaton are seen on Chloe's forehead.
13. *Many Dimensions*, pgs. 52-54, 88-93, 99-100

14. *Many Dimensions*, pg. 44, for example. It would not be surprising to find echoes of Waite's rituals for the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross in the Hajji's descriptions.
15. Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings*, George Allen and Unwin, 1978, pg. 77
16. In an undated letter to C. S. Lewis, in the Library of the Charles Williams Society.
17. Thelma Shuttleworth in *Notes on the Taliessin Poems of Charles Williams*, The Charles Williams Society, 1991, pg. 10
18. *Taliessin Through Logres*, OUP, 1938, pg. 2
19. Thelma Shuttleworth, in *Notes*, pg. 10.
20. *War in Heaven*, Gollancz, 1930, pg. 19
21. *Witchcraft*, Faber, 1941, pg. 78
22. Glen Cavaliero, *Charles Williams: Poet of Theology*, Macmillan, 1983, pg. 70
23. see above, pg. 18
24. In *Mysticism*, Methuen, 1911, Underhill has an Appendix: "A Historical Sketch of European Mysticism from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Death of Blake". In it, she mentions Islamic mystics in passing, but in such a way as to make it clear that they are part of the subject with which she is dealing (pg. 551)
25. *Many Dimensions*, pgs. 28-32
26. *Ibid*, pg. 219
27. *Ibid*, pg. 197
28. *Ibid*, pg. 257

29. Ibid, pg. 258
30. Quoted by Charles Williams in *The Descent of the Dove*, Longmans, 1939, pg. 61
31. *The Descent of the Dove*, pg. 62
32. Much of the material on the difference between apophatic and cataphatic theology was taken from Roberta Bondi, "Apophatic Theology", in *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, SCM Press, 1983, pg. 32
33. *The Descent of the Dove*, pg. 58
34. Ibid, pg. 59
35. *War in Heaven*, pg. 56
36. "The Founding of the Company", in *The Region of the Summer Stars*, Poetry (London) Editions, pg. 36
37. See above, pgs. 47-57
38. *Many Dimensions*, pg. 257
39. *The Gospel according to St. Luke* 1. 38. Howard has also noted these parallels, *The Novels of Charles Williams*, OUP, 1983, pg. 93
- 40) *Many Dimensions*, pg. 264
- 41) The Feast of the Annunciation is also the first of the four feasts associated with the Company of the Co-Inherence. See Sentence 7, in Appendix C, pg. 148.



### 3.4 The Place of the Lion

*The Place of the Lion* was published in the same year as *Many Dimensions* (1931) yet the later novel carries a conviction which the earlier lacks. *Many Dimensions* exhibits an unease between the author and his subject matter, which is particularly clear in the descriptions of the Stone of Suleiman. Many of these descriptions are esoteric and emotionally sterile, adding little to the action or atmosphere of the book. By contrast *The Place of the Lion* reveals the author handling his material with confidence. Cavaliero has summarized it as:

work(ing) less through images than through a myth, one peculiarly suited to Williams' imaginative gifts'. . . . Plot, themes and literary treatment coalesce in an artistic unity that makes *The Place of the Lion* the most technically flawless of the novels, and thus a more satisfyingly integrated fable than its predecessors<sup>2</sup>.

As a result of this unity, Williams' understanding of the nature of evil is demonstrated with particular clarity here.

One of the reasons for this success is that Williams has returned to a subject dear to his heart, the Way of Affirmation of Images, or the cataphatic approach to God. It is typical of Williams that this Way is not explored to the exclusion of the Negative Way, for he was concerned to show that these two approaches were complementary, rather than antithetical:

Rejection was to be rejection but not denial, as reception was to be reception but not subservience. 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. "Your life and death are with your neighbour." No Affirmation could be so complete as not to need definition, discipline, and refusal; no Rejection so absolute as not to leave necessary (literally and metaphorically) beans and a wild beast's skin and a little water.<sup>3</sup>

*The Place of the Lion*

This balance was not present in *Many Dimensions* where the Negative Way was explored at the expense of the Affirmative. In *The Place of the Lion*, the Affirmative is celebrated, yet the value of the Negative is affirmed also.

This is demonstrated through the two characters who consistently respond in a fitting manner to the invasion of the world by supernatural forces. One of these is Richardson, a bookseller's assistant, who recognizes this invasion before anyone else - it is a breaking through of those heavenly energies which are often represented as angelic. These forces are the source of such qualities as Strength, Subtlety and Beauty, and as they manifest themselves so they absorb these qualities back into themselves, thereby threatening the destruction of the world. This conception is the Platonic understanding of eternal Forms, adapted into a Christian framework by Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite.<sup>4</sup>

Richardson identifies these forces, but refuses to be diverted from his purpose; such supernatural manifestations are no more than a possible distraction:

Visions and auditions had nothing to do with the final surrender, which was - for him - a thing to be achieved wholly in itself, and (it seemed) without reference to any natural or supernatural event. . . . Chance, assisted by his personal preference, had given him a job among books, and as far as possible he read in those books of the many ways which are always the Way. But not by books or by phrases, not by images or symbols or myths, did he himself follow it. He abstracted himself continually from sense and from thought, attempting always a return to an interior nothingness where that which is itself no thing might communicate its sole essential being.<sup>5</sup>

Even here the two Ways co-inhere, for his personal preference was not sacrificed in his acquisition of an appropriate job. But it is in

accordance with the Way he has chosen to follow, that Richardson abandons himself to what may be the final conflagration:

" . . . if the fire that will destroy the world is here already, it isn't I that will keep away from it. . . . 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. . . ."

No-one saw the young bookseller's assistant again; no-one thought of him, except his employer and his landlady, and each of them, grumbling first, afterwards filled his place and forgot about him. Alone and unnoticed he went along the country road to his secret end. Only Anthony, as he went swiftly to Damaris, commended the other's soul to the Maker and Destroyer of images.<sup>6</sup>

Richardson's act of surrender is comparable to Chloe's in *Many Dimensions*, and in each case the surrender brings to an end their mortal life. Yet Chloe heals the natural order, which has been disrupted, while Richardson leaves the rest of the world in a state of disruption. Although he is one of the two characters who react in an appropriate way to the strange events occurring around him, he is a minor figure in the plot, and the Way of Negation a sub-theme here. The main action centres upon another young man, Anthony Durrant, and his exploration of the Way of Affirmation of Images. Indeed Durrant attempts to dissuade Richardson from his course:

And - you know best - but you're quite sure you're right ? I can't see but what the images have their place. *Ex umbris* perhaps, but the noon has to drive the shadows away naturally, hasn't it ?<sup>7</sup>

It is Durrant's awareness of the place that images have that is to restore the world, rather than Richardson's rejection of them.

That restoration is brought about by Durrant recognizing his own nature. The forces (Strength, Beauty, Subtlety etc.) are mixed in a unique combination in each human being, giving each a blend of abilities and

weaknesses. Therefore these powers already exist within Anthony, to some extent. When he is challenged, "Can you stand against them?":

"If they are part of me, as you tell me, perhaps I might; I don't know," Anthony answered. "But if they are, then perhaps the authority which is in me over me shall be in me over them. I'm repeating myself, I beg your pardon."<sup>9</sup>

The forces are symbolized in animal forms - the Lion of Strength, the Serpent of Subtlety, the Unicorn of Speed and so forth. Having expressed his determination to do what he can to bring them back under control, Durrant does not know how to act until he is reminded of an older myth:

The breach between mankind and the angelicals must be closed again; "a little child should lead them" - back. The lion should lie down with the lamb. Separately they had issued - strength divorced from innocence, fierceness from joy. They must go back together; somehow they must be called. Adam, long since - so the fable ran - standing in Eden had named the Celestials which were brought into existence before him. Their names - how should Anthony Durrant know their names, or by what title to summon again the lion and the serpent? Yet even in Anthony Durrant the nature of Adam lived. In Adam there had been perfect balance, perfect proportion: in Anthony - ?<sup>9</sup>

Equipped in a vision, he sets out to meet the Angelicals. When the Lion roars, Anthony answers it:

It was an incomprehensible call, and it broke out right in the midst of the other reverberating roar and checked and silenced it. It was the sound as of a single word, but not English, nor Latin, nor Greek. Hebrew it might have been or something older than Hebrew, some incantation whereby the prediluvian magicians had controlled contentions among spirits or the language in which our father Adam named the beasts of the garden.<sup>10</sup>

His cousin, Damaris watches:

Anthony - Adam - whatever giant stood before her between the trees of an aboriginal forest - was calling as he had called in the streets of the town. But now he uttered not one word but many, pausing between each, and again giving to each the same strong summons. He called and he commanded; nature lay expectant about him. She was aware then that the forest all around was in movement;

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living creatures showed themselves on its edge, or hurried through the grass. At each word that he cried, new life gathered, and still the litany of invocation and command went on. By the names that were the Ideas he called them, and the Ideas who are the Principles of everlasting creation heard him, the Principles of everlasting creation who are the Cherubim and Seraphim of the Eternal. In their animal manifestations, duly obedient to the single animal who was lord of the animals, they came. . . . They were returning, summoned by the authority of man from their incursion into the world of man.'<sup>1</sup>

Durrant acts the part of pre-lapsarian Adam, and so imposes order where chaos threatens. And yet he also reverses Adam's sin, putting right what Adam had made wrong. In 1938, a few years after completing *The Place of the Lion*, Williams was to write directly about Adam in a passage that has already been quoted in part<sup>2</sup>. It bears repetition:

It was, in future ages, declared by Aquinas that it was of the nature of God to know all possibilities, and to determine which possibility should become fact. "God would not know good things perfectly, unless he also knew evil things . . . for, since evil is not of itself knowable, forasmuch as 'evil is the privation of good', as Augustine says (*Confess.* iii. 7), therefore evil can neither be defined nor known, except by good." . . . 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.

It was not so possible for man . . . [he wished] 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. . . . 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.'<sup>3</sup>

This shows the importance to Williams not only of the Genesis myth, but also of his understanding that evil was good perceived as contradiction: good known "as antagonism". In 1942, when he wrote *The Forgiveness of Sins*, he reproduced the passage above in full<sup>4</sup>, as though he could find no

better way to explain himself. And through the work of the Incarnation, because of the Passion and Resurrection:

evil is known as an occasion of good, that is, of love. It has been always so known on the side of heaven, but now it can be so known on the side of earth also.<sup>15</sup>

If good has been known as evil, evil can be known as good; what has been lost can be restored. It is by his knowledge, by his appreciating things as they should be, that Anthony effects the restoration.

Durrant and Richardson are not the only people affected by the supernatural invasion. Some characters, such as Miss. Wilmot and Mr. Foster, see the angelicals as forces to be used for their own personal aggrandisement<sup>16</sup>. Because of their greed, instead of governing the forces, they are consumed by them, and revert to a bestial state<sup>17</sup>. Others are scared, and try to flee from the invasion. Quentin Sabot runs from the Lion until he is so exhausted that he almost destroys himself<sup>18</sup>; Damaris Tighe is terrified and nauseated by a pterodactyl until she is almost driven insane<sup>19</sup>. All of them know evil as evil, and cannot stand against it. Richardson looks beyond good and evil, to the place where such distinctions are no longer valid; he is not troubled by the angelicals, nor they by him. Only Durrant sees what the others know as evil; recognizing, affirming those forces, he knows them as good.

The parallel with Damaris is particularly illuminating at this point. She is writing a thesis on *Pythagorean Influences on Abelard*, she lectures on *The Eidola and the Angeli*:

"It's just a comparison, you know; largely between the sub-Platonic philosophers on the one side and the commentators on Dionysius the Areopagite on the other, suggesting that they have a common pattern in mind."<sup>20</sup>

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Therefore, of all the characters, she is the one who ought to recognize what is happening, and be able to identify the Forms. However, she is intellectually and spiritually blind, unable to appreciate the object of her study. She is only interested in her doctorate because it will increase her own importance, rather than because these philosophers and their ideas are important in and of themselves. Her father's illness, Anthony' love for her - these are irritating interruptions which she wants to be rid of, so that she can concentrate upon her work. Because of her attitude to her subject she reduces it to triviality:

There was to be a graph of human thought as an appendix - three graphs actually, from 500 B.C. to A.D. 1200. showing respectively the relation of official thought, cultural thought, and popular thought to the ideas of personalized and depersonalized supernatural powers. By looking at the graph it would be quite easy to see what attitude an Athenian citizen of the age of Thucydides, an Alexandrian friend of Plotinus, or a Burgundian peasant of the Middle Ages had towards this personification. . . . Personification was in itself evidence of a rather low cultural state; she had called it somewhere "The mind's habit of consoling itself with ideographs." As education developed so a sense of abstraction grew up, and it became more plausible to believe that the North Wind was a passage of air, and not an individual, or that St. Michael was a low-class synonym for - probably for just warfare, and justice pure and simple. . . . It was a good graph and she was proud of it.<sup>21</sup>

Her beliefs about personification are about to be challenged in a way that she could not have foreseen; so too is her attitude towards other people, an attitude that reduces them to points on a graph.

When Quentin, needing help himself, tries to help her, she pushes him away contemptuously<sup>22</sup>, because she wants to continue working on Abelard. On hearing about this Anthony warns her:

Dearest, you'll be like the fellow in the New Testament; you'll meet Abelard one day and he'll stare at you and say he never knew you.<sup>23</sup>

This warning is fulfilled when Damaris reaches a turning point. As she sits working for her Doctorate, the safety of her house is shattered by an angelical in the form of a pterodactyl breaking in. Bit by bit familiar surroundings fade away, until she seems to be in a marshy landscape, attacked by this terrible bird. A figure appears, who might bring help:

It was Peter Abelard himself, Abelard, mature, but still filled with youth because of the high intensity of his philosophical passion, and he was singing as he came. . . . Against that angry sky he came on, in that empty land his voice rang out in joy, and she tried to move; she ran a few steps forward, and made an effort to speak. Her voice failed; she heard herself making grotesque noises in her throat, and suddenly over him there fell the ominous shadow of the pterodactyl. Only for a few seconds, then it passed on, and he emerged from it, and his face was towards her, but now it had changed. Now it was like a vile corpse, and yet still it was uttering things: it croaked at her in answer to her own croakings, strange and meaningless words. *Individualiter, essentialiter, categoricum, differentia substantialis* - croak, croak, croak.<sup>24</sup>

This is exactly the way in which she has treated Abelard; she has not responded to "the high intensity of his philosophical passion", she has made him a "vile corpse" through her dissection of his ideas (was Abelard, too, to be fixed on the graph?). Damaris has taken something good, and turned it into something evil, by the power of her perception. What makes this change plain, what reduces a highly intelligent woman to incoherence, is the "shadow of the pterodactyl" falling over her.

By contrast, Durrant is able to rescue her, to stand against the Lion, and finally command all the angelicals because he moves in the power of the Eagle. This he does instinctively at first; when Sabot and he meet the Lion, Sabot shoots at it, then runs away. Anthony wants to respond differently:

To keep himself steady, to know somehow within himself what was happening, to find such a capacity of his manhood even here - some desire of such an obscure nature stirred in him as he spoke. He felt as if he were riding against some terrific wind; he was balancing



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upon the instinctive powers of his spirit; he did not fight this awful opposition but poised himself within and above it.<sup>25</sup>

As the experience continues he feels almost as though he is in an aeroplane. It is Richardson who explains what has happened, as he reads from the Latin document that describes "the power of the Divine Ones":

For though these nine zones are divided into a trinity of trinities, yet after another fashion there are four without and four within, and between them is the Glory of the Eagle. For this is he who knows both himself and the others, and is their own knowledge: as it is written *We shall know as are known* - this is the knowledge of the Heavenly Ones in the place of the Heavenly Ones, and it is called the Virtue of the Celestials.<sup>26</sup>

The Eagle seems to represent knowledge and balance together, which might be summarized as wisdom. This capacity exists naturally within Anthony, who learns to exercise it deliberately. Damaris also has the capacity, but she has perverted it, using it only for herself. When Durrant breaks into her vision and saves her, the Eagle rests on his shoulder and the pterodactyl is seen no more<sup>27</sup>. But it is not that the one has scared the other away, rather they are the same thing seen in different ways. Damaris has known "good as antagonism", she has turned good into evil. Anthony, acting as Adam, reverses that and knows evil as "an occasion of good".

Williams runs the risk here of presenting Durrant as an initiate of some gnostic mysteries. Indeed, speaking of his taking authority over the angelicals, Knight has said:

There could hardly be a better definition for the higher processes of white magic.<sup>28</sup>

What prevents *The Place of the Lion* from becoming an exploration of the occult is partly Williams' sense of humour, which he uses to lighten the tension<sup>29</sup>, but mainly the plain motivation he gives to the central

character. Durrant has no desire to wield cosmic powers, he is not particularly concerned with saving the world. He acts as he does because of the demands of love and friendship - and even these are understated. When Foster offers his explanation of what is happening to Quentin and Anthony, the latter responds:

"You know, Quentin, I'm almost certain that Damaris will dislike it very much indeed. It will interfere with Abelard dreadfully. And of course you may remember that I promised to do everything I could to help her get her degree."

"Even", Mr. Foster asked sarcastically, "to ruling the various worlds of creation?"

"Everything," Anthony answered. ". . . . Actually, of course, I feel that all this thesis of yours is pure bunk. But I've watched some curious things happen, and now you tell me of others. I should hate anything to worry Miss. Tighe - seriously; a little worry might be a perfectly good thing for her. And Mr. Sabot doesn't want the lion, and Mr. Sabot and I have done our best for years to assist one another against undue interference."

"Interference!" Foster said, with another laugh.

"Well, you can hardly call it less, can you?"<sup>30</sup>

The world is in danger of being destroyed, yet Anthony is going to act in order to help the woman he loves to get her degree, and to assist a friend against "undue interference". Williams is using the humour of understatement to reduce the intensity of the situation.

In the penultimate chapter of the book Durrant returns to the flat he and Sabot have shared, in case his friend should seek refuge there. Surrounded by familiar objects - objects that provoked, and resulted from, amicable disagreements - he is led to contemplate the nature and importance of friendship:

[Anthony] had accepted those exchanges, so far as mortal frailty could, as being of the nature of final and eternal being. Though they did not last, their importance did; though any friendship might be shattered, no strife and no separation could deny the truth

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within it: all immortality could but more clearly reveal what in those moments had been.<sup>31</sup>

Much was possible to a man in solitude; perhaps the final transmutations and achievements in the zones on 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 a balance could humility be found, humility which was a lucid speed to welcome lucidity whenever and wherever it presented itself. How much he owed to Quentin ! how much - not pride but delight urged the admission - Quentin owed to him ! Balance - and movement in balance, as an eagle sails up on the wind - this was the truth of life, and beauty in life.<sup>32</sup>

Charles Williams is often associated with romantic love - it was the subject of his first theological work, and is one of the main themes of the next novel to be published, *The Greater Trumps* - yet that theme is given limited attention here. Rather he is concerned to stress the importance of  $\phi\lambda\iota\alpha$ , without ignoring  $\epsilon\rho\omicron\varsigma$  (expressed in the love that exists between Damaris and Anthony by the end of the novel), for it is while reflecting on friendship that Anthony moves to the place of the Eagle, and so receives the heavenly wisdom which he needs to restore the world.

Once again, the main thrust of a Williams' novel can be seen as part of the common Christian tradition. If *War in Heaven* highlighted the Eucharist, and *Many Dimensions* submission to the divine will, *The Place of the Lion* is a reminder of the second great commandment: to love your neighbour as yourself. Yet here there are none of the weaknesses that damaged the earlier works. In a novel that speaks of the Way of Affirmation of Images, Williams has found the right images to express himself with confidence.

Footnotes:

1. Cavaliero, Glen, *Charles Williams: Poet of Theology*, Macmillan, 1983, pg. 73
2. Ibid, pg. 76
3. *The Descent of the Dove*, Longmans, 1939, reprinted Eerdmans, 1978, pgs. 57,58. All references are to the Eerdmans edition.
4. The link with Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite is acknowledged in passing when the forces are called the "Dionysian nine" (*The Place of the Lion*, Gollancz, 1931, pg. 91) and the "Divine Celestials" (pg. 90), which could be a reference to Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchies*. See above, pgs. 79,80 for a discussion of the importance of Dionysius to Williams.
5. *The Place of the Lion*, pg. 139
6. Ibid, pgs. 194, 195
7. Ibid, pg. 194
8. Ibid, pg. 57
9. Ibid, pg. 190
10. Ibid, pgs. 198, 199
11. Ibid, pgs. 201, 202
12. See above, pgs. 38, 39
13. *He Came Down From Heaven*, Heinemann, 1938, pgs. 17-19
14. *The Forgiveness of Sins*, Geoffrey Bles, 1942, pgs. 19-21
15. *He Came Down From Heaven*, Heinemann, 1938, pgs. 78, 79
16. *The Place of the Lion*, pgs. 81-86, 144, 145
17. This can be seen happening to Miss. Wilmot on pg. 151, to Mr. Foster on pgs. 173-178. Such a process may be echoed by C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, The Bodley Head, 1956, reprinted Puffin, 1964, pg. 101, where the talking cat, Ginger, after an act of blasphemous presumption has the power of speech taken away from him.
18. *The Place of the Lion*, pgs. 67, 68, 101, 176
19. Ibid, pgs. 128-133
20. Ibid, pg. 24
21. Ibid, pg. 127

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22. Ibid, pgs. 99-101
23. Ibid, pg. 105. The reference is to *Matthew 7. 21-23.*
24. *The Place of the Lion*, pg. 133
25. Ibid, pg. 67
26. Ibid, pg. 92
27. Ibid, pg. 134
28. Knight, Gareth, *The Magical World of the Inklings*, Element Books, 1990, pg. 181
29. A good example of Williams' humour comes in *The Place of the Lion*, pg. 111, as Anthony enters the house where all the changes had started:  
    Couldn't he get back now, on some excuse or none, before the door opened and they had to go in where that old man, as he remembered him, lay in his terrible passivity ? What new monstrosity, beast of indescribable might or beauty, was even now perhaps dragging itself down the stairs ? What behemoth would come lumbering through the hall ?  
    Actually the only behemoth, and though she was fat she was hardly that, was the housekeeper.
30. *The Place of the Lion*, pg. 56
31. Ibid, pg. 182
32. Ibid, pg. 187
33. *Matthew 22. 39.*

### 3.5 The Greater Trumps

The extent of Williams' knowledge of the Tarot pack and its symbolism has been remarked upon already<sup>1</sup>. Influenced, yet not dominated, by Waite it seems likely that Williams had created his own cards, rearranging the Major Arcana for reasons that remain unclear. The images contained in any pack are wide ranging, with the result that the symbolic interpretation of those images has taken many different forms. Waite had claimed that:

The Tarot embodies symbolical presentations of universal ideas, behind which lie all the implicits of the human mind, and it is in this sense that they contain secret doctrine, which is the realization by the few of truths imbedded in the consciousness of all, though they have not passed into express recognition by ordinary men.<sup>2</sup>

This indicates the biggest problem with *The Greater Trumps*. Whereas the three previous novels have each had one central symbol, this novel has a collection of symbols. There are twenty-two greater trumps in a Tarot pack, as well as fifty-six other cards. No one novel could begin to use so many images. To be fair, Williams does not attempt to develop all of the cards. Many are described briefly, and remain as part of a kaleidoscopic background. But four are used extensively - the Falling Tower, the Lovers, the Juggler, and the Fool - and some confusion results. Cavaliero comments:

The speed with which these novels were written tells badly on *The Greater Trumps*. Nowhere does Williams have such a rich and suggestive complex of imagery, and nowhere does he throw it away so carelessly. He displays an impatient imagination, and there is a disproportion between the profundity of the theme and the frequent frivolity of its expression.<sup>3</sup>

This is all the more frustrating because the novel does raise important issues, particularly relating to Williams' understanding of salvation and evil.

The opening words of the novel, "perfect Babel"<sup>4</sup> establishes the Tower as one of the most recurrent symbols in the novel. The myth of Babel - of an action undertaken out of pride, which is brought to nothing through the indirect action of God - is retold in the behaviour of the gypsies, Henry and Aaron Lee. Their family has, for generations, been the guardians of the golden images that are the counterparts of the playing cards. When Henry happens upon the latter, raising the possibility that the two could be reunited, that:

we can find out - at any moment - what the dance says ? We can tell what the future will be - from what the present is ? <sup>5</sup>

the gypsies begin to make plans, recognizing that the owner of the cards, Mr. Coningsby, is unlikely to part with them voluntarily. Having brought him to Aaron's house for Christmas, and having failed in a direct appeal, the plotters decide to use the power of the cards to kill Mr. Coningsby, trusting that the love his daughter, Nancy, has for Henry will be sufficient to bind both her and her aunt, Sybil, to their purposes. The would-be guardians are content to make plans for all the other characters as if the latter were no more than playing cards themselves, to be arranged at the pleasure of the former.

These plans come to nothing. When Henry uses the tarots to summon a magical snow storm to kill Mr. Coningsby, Nancy distracts him accidentally, and he loses not only the tarots, but also control of the storm. Her confidence in Henry is shattered, his hopes are ruined:

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In that great ending of both their spirits they could not clamour. The Tower that each had raised - the Babel of their desired heavens - had fallen in the tumult of their conflicting wills and languages, and a terrible quiet was within their hearts. They were joined in an unformulated union of despair.<sup>6</sup>

When Waite had commented on the Tower, he had said:

It illustrates also in the most comprehensive way the old truth that "except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it".<sup>7</sup>

Nancy and Henry have both had their ambitions destroyed, for both have been building their towers in the wrong way. To gain his goal Henry was prepared to use murder, while Nancy was prepared to deceive her father in order to get the cards to Henry.<sup>8</sup>

The desolation that the young couple experience affects other characters as well. The threat of the storm shakes Aaron Lee's beliefs to the point of destruction. His life has been devoted to caring for, and trying to understand, the golden images. With the cards that promise to give that understanding back under his roof, it is his suggestion to keep them there by "loosing the Tarots upon"<sup>9</sup> Coningsby. And yet, when his idea has been tried and the storm unleashed, thereby threatening the lives of all those within the house, his terror is such that it forces him to abandon everything he has built his life upon:

The manuscripts told them this and that, but the manuscripts might be wrong. In the belief that they were true, Henry and he had plotted to destroy his guest - but the storm might be a coincidence; Coningsby might be safe; in an ordinary storm he would be; it wasn't as if, all put together, it was a long distance or a great danger, *unless* - unless the snow and wind had been aimed at him. If they were not, if it was chance, if indeed the Tarots and the images had no power in themselves and were but passive reflections of more universal things, if the mystery of both was but a mystery of knowledge and prophecy and not of creation and direction - why then - the stranger would come back safely, and, if he did, why then



they would all be safe. That some of the paintings should be lost was indeed a catastrophe; no one now could justly divine the movement of the images and their meaning. The telling of fortunes would be for ever but a childish game, and never the science of wisdom. But he would be alive. The long study in which he had spent his years might partly fail. But he would be alive. 10

The internal rhythm of the long sentence beginning "If they were not", the speed suggested by the repetition of the word "if", mirrors the growing panic in the old man's mind. Clarity of thought is restored with the realization that there is only one thing that matters to him now: "But he would be alive". Like his son, Aaron has "laboured in vain" at his task. But his quick abandonment of faith when his own life is imperilled calls to mind another Biblical parallel. In a passage which talks of the cost of commitment, and the need to hold your own life lightly, *St. Luke* describes Jesus saying:

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he has sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build, and was not able to finish". 11

Aaron's "tower", his hopes and ambitions, comes crashing down because he does not have the inner resources to finish it.

Yet the novel does not close upon images of destruction. When Henry and Nancy have been reunited, they return to the room of the images in order to do whatever they can to restore the cards that have been lost, and so quieten the threatening storm. A golden mist fills the room, and the couple are separated. Henry finds himself held in place, seeing a vision of a tower built out of hands, that rises and falls repeatedly. This repetitive



cycle symbolizes Henry's life, the choices he has made, until he himself becomes the tower, rising and falling:

The stars were beyond his reach; Babel was for ever doomed to fall. . . . But now, each time that he felt the dreadful ruin go falling through him, he heard also one voice rising among that strange and shattering chorus and saying: "Remember I wanted to love." Out of each overthrow it sounded, and at every overthrow more clearly. This alone of all his past was urgent; this alone had meaning in the void to which his purpose crashed.<sup>12</sup>

The words he hears are Nancy's, said before the mist divided them. On her part, having completed her task, a different vision is waiting:

Yet another moon shone over the house on the Downs, like that which was among the one and twenty illuminations of the Greater Trumps. For there, high between two towers, the moon shines, clear and perfect, and the towers are no longer Babels ever rising and falling, but complete in their degree. Below them again, on either side of a long and lonely road, two handless beasts - two dogs, or perhaps a wolf and a dog - sit howling, as if something which desired attainment but had not entered into attainment cried out unprofitably to the gentle light disseminated from above.<sup>13</sup>

They have become those towers, they have "entered into attainment". The Tower represents hopes rising and falling, and rising again. The positive resolution of this cycle depends on the love that has grown between the young couple. That love, and the card which symbolizes it, needs to be examined now.

When Mr. Coningsby shows the Tarot pack to his family for the first time, Henry directs Nancy's attention to the Lovers, explaining: "That's at least the first movement" of the "everlasting dance"<sup>14</sup>. The two of them are engaged, so they ought to be represented by the Lovers. However, the discovery of the cards has produced a significant change in Henry:

[he] turned his eyes to hers. But hers, as they looked to plunge into that other depth - ocean pouring into ocean and itself receiving ocean - found themselves thwarted. Instead of oceans they

saw pools, abandoned by a tide already beyond sight: she blenched as a bather might do in the cold wind across an empty shore.<sup>15</sup>

Whatever is implied of past support and mutual care has come to an end. Henry has withdrawn into himself, and the love that exists between himself and Nancy has become a tool for him to use.

Having reported his discovery to his grandfather, immediately they begin to plan how they might gain the pack. Violence is mentioned, and rejected at this stage, but robbery is considered seriously:

"Only violence. . . that's unwise," Aaron answered. "But to take them. . . to take them for this purpose. . . I don't see the wrong."

"Mr. Lothair Coningsby would see the wrong," Henry said drily. "And I doubt if I could persuade Nancy."

"What's she to do with it?" his grandfather asked contemptuously.

Henry smiled again, a bright but almost threatening flash of amusement. "I wonder," he said. "But, whatever I wonder, be certain, grandfather, that I'm determined not to go against her till . . ."

He stopped for so long that Aaron said, "Till - till when?"

"Till I've seen whether the image of the Lovers has another use," Henry finished. "To know - to see from within - to be aware of the dance. Well, we shall see."<sup>16</sup>

No ethical reservations are voiced, or even sentimental - Henry does not say, "I love Nancy and therefore do not want to see any harm come to her or her father". Instead: "I'm determined not to go against her till" - until she is no longer of any use. Henry wishes to act as a conscious participant in the great dance (Williams' symbol for the inter-relationship of all that exists<sup>17</sup>) to discover its secrets. Nancy is valuable to him in so far as she can help him to achieve that aim. Even when he releases her from an embrace:

there was in his action something of one who . . . watches a complex and delicate piece of equipment to see if everything runs smoothly, and the experiment for which it is meant may be safely dared.<sup>18</sup>

It is clear that the reader is being shown a mockery of love - Henry wants to use the Lovers, without knowing what love is. The irony here is that, according to Williams, his theory is correct. The way to understand the deepest secrets of the universe is through love - as *the Cloud of Unknowing* had outlined centuries earlier:

Bot siþ ale resonable creatures, aungel & man, haþ in hem, ilchone by hem-self, o principal worching miyt, þe whiche is clepid a knowable miyt, & a-noper principal worching miyt, þe whiche is clepid a louyng miyt: of þe whiche two miytes, to þe first, þe whiche is a knowyng miyt, God, þat is þe maker of hem, is euermore incomprehensible; & to þe secound, þe whiche is þe louyng miyt, in ilch one diuersly he is al comprehensible at þe fulle.<sup>19</sup>

Henry is calculating how to act, working out how to use the Coningsbys for his own advantage. He is relying on his "knowyng miyt", and so the meaning of the tarots remains incomprehensible to him. Nancy, however, is in love, or at least she is beginning to love. And so, even as Henry begins to teach her about the cards, and about the wisdom they contain, it appears that she may know more than he does - a possibility which will be realized as the novel continues:

"All things are held together by correspondence, image with image, movement with movement: without that there could be no relation and therefore no truth. It is our business - especially yours and mine - to take up the power of relation. Do you know what I mean?"

As she suddenly looked up at him, she almost smiled.

"Darling," she murmured, "how couldn't I know *that*? I didn't need the cards to tell me. Ah, but go on: show me what it means in them."

For another second he paused, arrested: it was as if she had immediately before her something which he sought far off.<sup>20</sup>

Love can easily become a selfish emotion, forming an exclusive relationship between two people that cuts them off from others. Under the guidance of her aunt, Sybil, Nancy is not allowed to fall into that trap.

The feeling that she has for her fiancé has to be turned outwards, so that it affects everyone she meets. When she protests that this is impossible:

"If you give it back to itself," Sybil said, "wholly and utterly, it will do all that for you. You've no idea what a lot it can do."<sup>21</sup>

Although not stated explicitly, it is clear that a personification of love is taking place. To see Christ as Love Incarnate is not an original concept<sup>22</sup>, but it is one that Williams often used<sup>23</sup>. A direct identification is made only in passing in *The Greater Trumps*<sup>24</sup>, and yet it is often suggested.

The most important moment for Nancy as she learns about love, comes in the local Church on Christmas morning. This passage has already been quoted and discussed<sup>25</sup>, where the point was made that Williams wanted to emphasize the innate link between the insight Nancy is acquiring, and the commonplace - possibly, slightly dull - services available to any Christian. Equally important is the timing of this event. Any Sunday in the winter would have satisfied the broad demands of the plot, but it is not accidental that this revelation of the nature, and demands, of love breaks upon Nancy on Christmas Day - the feast of the Incarnation. Later in the service the Athanasian Creed captures her attention:

But the second part - and it was of course the setting - for one verse held her. It was of course the setting, the chance that sent one boy's voice sounding exquisitely through the church. But the words which conveyed that beauty sounded to her full of sudden significance. The mingled voices of men and boys were proclaiming the nature of Christ - "God and man is one in Christ"; then the boys fell silent, and the men went on, "One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God." On the assertion they ceased, and the boys rushed joyously in, "One altogether, not" - they looked at the idea and tossed it airily away - "not by confusion of substance, but by unity" - they rose, they danced, they triumphed - "by unity, by unity" - they were silent all but one, and that one fresh perfection proclaimed the full

consummation, each syllable rounded, prolonged, exact - "by unity of person".

It caught the young listening creature; the enigmatic phrase quivered with beautiful significance. Sybil at her side somehow answered to it; she herself perhaps - she herself in love. Something beyond understanding, but not beyond achievement showed itself.<sup>26</sup>

*The Greater Trumps* is, possibly, the novel in which Williams' occult interest and learning is most obvious. In the dazzling richness of the tarot images, even a reader who does not share the author's predilections can feel the attraction of them. Yet set against this confusing ornate display is the simplicity of the open secret of the Incarnation - God made Human. The contrast is marked, and underlines the centrality of the Incarnation in Williams' thinking.

Despite the understanding she has attained, Nancy is shattered when, later the same day, she interrupts Henry as he attempts to kill her father by magical means. It is Sybil's task both to encourage and rebuke her niece so that the younger woman learns the discipline of love which will lead her to rise again, after the destruction of her hopes:

"Do you think the mystery of Love is only between those who like one another?" Sybil said. "Darling, you're part of the mystery and you'll be sent to do mysterious things. Tell me - no, never mind the storm; it's nothing; it's under the feet of the Fool - tell me what's happened."<sup>27</sup>

And after the explanations:

"Nancy, you said it yourself, there's death and there's you. Are you going to be part of death against Henry and against your father? or are you going to be life between them? You'll be power one way or another, don't doubt that; you've got to be. You've got to live in them or let them die in you. Make up your mind quickly, for the time's almost gone."

"I can't do anything," Nancy cried out.

Sybil stood up and went over to her. "Your father came back with me," she said. "Go and see if Henry still has any idea of going anywhere with you. Go and see what he wants, and if you can give it to him, do. I'll see to your father and you see to Henry. Do let's get on to important things."

"Give it to him!" Nancy exclaimed. "But . . ."

"Dearest," Sybil said, "he may not want now what he wanted two hours ago. People change their minds, you know. Yes, honestly. Go and live, go and love. Get farther, get farther - now, with Henry if you can. If not - listen, Nancy - if *not*, and if you loved him, then go and agonize to adore the truth of Love. Now."<sup>28</sup>

Thus strengthened, Nancy can go to Henry and reconcile him both to her, and to himself. With her honest comment: "I never loved you more and yet I never loved you less"<sup>29</sup> - which seems an excellent description of the determination to love with or without the support of natural feelings - they return to the room of images where they succeed in abating the anger of the storm, and regain the missing cards.

All of which is to discuss *The Greater Trumps* in terms of the actions and motivations of the characters. While this is an entirely appropriate course of action, Williams encourages the reader to view the novel from a different perspective as well - a perspective that can be explored best by an examination of two more of the Major Arcana: the Juggler and the Fool. These are linked and contrasted, standing respectively first and last in the list of Trumps<sup>30</sup>, the former possessing an explanation of sorts, the latter not:

"The Juggler - if it is a juggler?" she asked.

"It is the beginning of all things - a show, a dexterity of balance, a flight, and a falling. It's the only way he - whoever he was - could form the beginning and the continuation of the dance itself."

"Is it God then?" Nancy asked, herself yet more hushed.

Henry moved impatiently. "What do we know?" he answered. "This isn't a question of words. God or gods or no gods, these things are,

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and they're meant and manifested thus. Call it God if you like, but it's better to call it the Juggler and mean neither God nor no God."

"And the Fool who doesn't move?" she said after a pause.

"All I can tell you of that", he said grimly, "is that it is the Fool who doesn't move. There are tales and writings of everything but the Fool; he comes into none of the doctrines or the fortunes. I've never yet seen what he can be."<sup>21</sup>

Despite the warning that he is and is not, God, it is tempting to see the Juggler as divine. In the church, Nancy's attention is taken from the Lovers to the Juggler; in the depths of his despair, convinced that the storm is going to destroy the whole world, Henry comments:

The dance is ending; the Juggler's finished with one ball.<sup>22</sup>

On the table of images, it is the Juggler who dances "continuously round the edge of the circle"<sup>23</sup>, as though containing the action of all the others. The visual impact of the image, of someone giving vitality to other objects, keeping them in motion, suggests the creative power of God, beginning and continuing all things. It is easy to conceive of a God like the Juggler, full of life and energy. But such a picture cannot cope with the realities of suffering and evil, cannot explain why things go wrong, why there are gaps in the dance.

The Fool is not easily explained. The gypsies, who can comment on the significance of the other cards, admit that they have nothing to say about this trump. Because of this a large part of their excitement on rediscovering the original tarot pack is:

Who knows? perhaps we can find out what the Fool means, and why it doesn't dance.<sup>24</sup>



## *The Greater Trumps*

Indeed, all they are sure about is that the Fool does not move, being the one image who takes no part in the dance, but remains motionless in the middle. Yet when the visitors are shown the table of the images, Sybil is unable to see the Fool at first. To her it is not in the centre, rather:

It's moving so quickly I can hardly see it - there - ah, it's gone again. Surely that's it, dancing with the rest; it seems as if it were always arranging itself for some place which was empty for it.<sup>36</sup>

Sybil has affinities with the Fool. She too is described as "never seeming to move"<sup>36</sup>, she frequently acts in a way her brother considers as very foolish<sup>37</sup>. And yet she is clearly the character who consistently does the right thing, the only one who can see beyond the chaos when things go wrong, and so remain untroubled. She exemplifies Paul's advice (and in so doing, implicitly challenges the others to do the same):

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.<sup>38</sup>

And if she is the fool who is wise, - so the Fool itself is:

the foolishness of God [which] is wiser than men; and the weakness of God [which] is stronger than men.<sup>39</sup>

The foolishness of God caused the incomprehensible - the Cross. Only the foolishness of God is wise enough to look at antagonism, and recognize it as good.

According to the image Williams was using in *The Greater Trumps*, sin is a mis-step, deliberate or accidental, in the great dance. Yet that mis-step can never be serious enough to destroy the dance, for the Fool is always

there to complete the measure. When Sybil goes to rescue her brother from the snow she sees the Fool with him<sup>40</sup>. Later she can encourage Nancy with:

I know the dance, and the figures that make the dance. The crown's gold over them, and there's a movement that Henry's not known yet. Do you suppose that storm can ever touch the Fool ?"<sup>41</sup>

The Fool is the incomprehensible nature of God, save that - as even the apophatic *Cloud of Unknowing* affirms - God can always be known as Love.

The Fool represents Williams' conviction that:

there was not - there never has been and never will be - anything else than the good to know.<sup>42</sup>

It is a conviction that is sometimes obscured by the sheer number of symbols used in *The Greater Trumps*, but it is undeniably present. Indeed, it is expressed directly in an early exchange between Mr. Coningsby and his sister:

"Good heavens, no !" said Sybil, and being in what her brother called one of her perverse moods, added, "I love that phrase."

"What phrase," asked Mr. Coningsby, having missed anything particular.

"Good heavens," Sybil repeated, separating the words. "It says everything almost, doesn't it ? I don't like to say 'Good God' too often; people so often misunderstand."

"Sometimes you talk exactly in Nancy's irresponsible way, Sybil," her brother complained. "I don't see any sense in it. Why should one want to say 'Good God' ?"

"Well, there isn't really much else to say, is there ?"<sup>43</sup>

Footnotes:

1. See above, pg. 12
2. *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot*, A. E. Waite, 1910. All references are to the University Books edition, 1959, with an introduction by Gertrude Moakley. Pg. 59
3. Cavaliero, Glen, *Charles Williams: Poet of Theology*, Macmillan, 1983, pg. 78.
4. *The Greater Trumps*. First published Gollancz 1932, reprinted Eerdmans 1978, pg. 7. All future references are to the Eerdmans edition.
5. Ibid, pg. 30
6. Ibid, pg. 122
7. *The Pictorial Key*, pgs. 134, 135.
8. *The Greater Trumps*, pg. 93
9. Ibid, pg. 87
10. Ibid, pgs. 151, 152
11. *Luke* 14. 28-30
12. *The Greater Trumps*, pgs. 168, 169
13. Ibid, pg. 195
14. Ibid, pgs. 22, 21
15. Ibid, pg. 18
16. Ibid, pg. 32
17. "Imagine that everything which exists takes part in the movement of a great dance - everything, the electrons, all growing and decaying things, all that seems alive, men and beasts, trees and stones, everything that changes, and there is nothing anywhere that does not change. That change - that's what we know of the immortal dance; the law in the nature of things - that's the measure of the dance."  
*The Greater Trumps* pg. 94
18. Ibid, pg. 50
19. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. P. Hodgson, Early English Text Society, 1944, ch. 4, pgs. 18, 19. Williams knew *The Cloud* well. In *The Descent of the Dove*, Longmans, 1939, he twice compares it with Dante, as being the great examples of the Negative and Positive Ways respectively - pgs. 129, & 140.

20. *The Greater Trumps*, pg. 44
21. Ibid, pg. 69
22. One example among many would be Herbert's poem, "Love bade me welcome"
23. Williams uses this imagery in *Outlines of Romantic Theology*, pg. 14 (written in 1923/4, but only published in 1990 by Eerdmans), and in *The Descent of the Dove*, pg. 46
24. "And what," Mr. Coningsby said, as if this riddle were entirely unanswerable, "what do you call the hypothesis of Christianity ?"  
"The Deity of Love and the Incarnation of Love ?" Sybil suggested.  
*The Greater Trumps*, pg. 106
25. See above, pgs. 14-16. The passage in question is *The Greater Trumps* pgs, 107, 108
26. *The Greater Trumps* pgs. 109, 110 -
27. *The Greater Trumps* pgs. 139, 140
28. Ibid, pgs, 142, 143
29. Ibid, pg. 147
30. Ibid, pgs. 16, 17
31. Ibid, pg. 98
32. Ibid, pg. 144
33. Ibid, pg. 29
34. Ibid, pg. 36
35. Ibid, pg. 74. According to Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings* Unwin 1978, pg. 98: "[T. S.] Eliot by his own admission took the 'still point of the turning world' in *Burnt Norton* from the Fool in Williams' *The Greater Trumps*."
36. *The Greater Trumps* pg. 53
37. For example, in the meeting with Joanna, *The Greater Trumps* pgs. 59-65
38. *1 Corinthians* ch. 3, vs. 18, 19a
39. *1 Corinthians* ch. 1, vs. 25
40. *The Greater Trumps* pg. 127
41. *The Greater Trumps* pg. 139

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42. *He Came down From Heaven*, Heinemann, 1938, pg. 19
43. *The Greater Trumps* pg. 40

### 3.6 Descent Into Hell

Critical opinion unites in recognizing *Descent into Hell* as the finest of Williams' novels, indeed as one of the best works he produced:

In *Descent into Hell* Williams came closer perhaps than in any other of his tales to giving us a real novel.<sup>1</sup>

and:

This is the best of Williams' novels, and a substantial step forward in his fusion of idea with literary experience<sup>2</sup>. . . . [in it he] came near to writing a masterpiece, and its particular fusion of several orders of reality constitutes, together with similar achievements in *All Hallows' Eve* and the Arthurian poems, his most distinctive contribution to literary mythology.<sup>3</sup>

In it, the question of Williams' understanding of the nature of evil is brought into sharp focus. This novel, along with *All Hallows' Eve*, clearly demonstrate his perception that evil is good known "as antagonism", and his belief that all things can therefore be redeemed.

*Descent into Hell* is also the least overtly occult of all Williams' novels; there is no mysterious object of power, no Kabbalistic learning is needed to understand the action of the plot. This avoids the danger of overloading the narrative, as had happened in *Many Dimensions* and *The Greater Trumps*. However, even here Williams was inspired by his knowledge of the esoteric, although in a more subtle fashion than in some of his earlier novels.

In the minor character Mrs. Sammille, many commentators have seen a reference to the evil angel Samaël, mentioned in the Kabblah<sup>4</sup>. A.E. Waite, who had been a significant influence on Williams as a young man<sup>5</sup>, mentions this demon at several points. One extract will stand for many:

He who rode upon the serpent, the Tempter-Spirit or Samaël, who is said also to have descended from heaven so mounted, as if he were an accredited messenger, approached Eve and testified that the Holy One created the world by help of the Tree of Knowledge; that by eating thereof, and so only, was He able to create the world; and that if the woman ate of it, on her own part, she would attain the same power.<sup>6</sup>

By linking Samaël with the Fall, Waite establishes him as a power of deception, as well as temptation; what he offers Eve is illusory, and the price of her acceptance is glossed over. Mrs. Sannile operates in the same way. When Pauline Anstruther admits that she is troubled, Mrs. Sannile first offers to tell her a tale that will comfort her, and then continues:

And if we can't find a tale we'll do as well. Cross my hand with silver, and I'll not only tell you a good fortune, I'll make you one. Like the Bible - wine and milk without money, or for so little it hardly counts.<sup>7</sup>

When they next meet, the offer is spelt out more fully:

I could tell you tales that would shut everything but yourself out. Wouldn't you like to be happy? If there's anything that worries you, I can shut it away from you. Think what you might be missing. . . . If you will come with me, I can fill you, fill your body with any sense you choose. I can make you feel whatever you'd chose to be. I can give you certainty of joy for every moment of life. Secretly, secretly; no other soul - no other living soul.<sup>8</sup>

This possibility is highly attractive, and it is little wonder that Pauline finds it tempting. However, warning bells begin to ring when Mrs. Sannile slightly misquotes the Bible. The offer of *Isaiah* 55. 1 is:

come buy wine and milk without money and without price

there is no mention of "so little it hardly counts". By contrast, there is a price to be paid by all those who follow Samaël's path. It may seem small, for it involves the participants getting what they say they want,

and giving up what they say they do not want. However, the novel illustrates what a terrible price this is. Lawrence Wentworth, whose descent into hell the novel describes, works out his own damnation by a progressive rejection of other people, by shutting out everything but himself. As he retreats into himself, he cuts himself off from everything that might be of real (as opposed to illusory) benefit to him.

Wentworth will be examined shortly. Before moving on, however, there is one other occult reference that deserves comment. Mrs. Sannile's Christian name is Lily, which Howard finds significant:

Her name is transparent. Lily is Lilith, the witch-like figure in ancient Jewish lore who was believed to have been Adam's first wife, and who, because she was dissatisfied with things, was exiled from Eden and replaced by Eve.<sup>9</sup>

Although the description of Lilith is correct, the identification of the names may seem slightly strained. It is also superfluous, since there are direct references to this mythological figure, not all of which are associated with Mrs. Sannile. The most important of these revolve around the mysterious figure who comes to Wentworth in the form of Adela Hunt, the young woman to whom he feels attracted. When first this succubus approaches the historian she leads him on a journey that is in part around the physical landscape of Battle Hill, and in part inside himself, until he has a vision of Eden with Adam sleeping just before the rib was taken for the creation of Eve. She urges him on this journey with:

Yes, yes, yes: better than Eve, dearer than Eve, closer than Eve. It's good for man to be alone.<sup>10</sup>

and is finally identified as:

She whose origin is with man's, kindred to him as he to his beasts, alien from him as he from his beasts; to whom a name was given in a



myth, Lilith for a name and Eden for a myth, and she a stirring more certain than name or myth.<sup>11</sup>

That Wentworth should be seduced by Lilith is entirely appropriate for, according to legend, she was Adam's partner originally, even as Samaël was Eve's. Waite notes:

According to *Zohar Ha Hadash, § Yithro*, the seduction of Adam by Lilith and of Eve by her companion Samaël caused our mortal condition. This is the sense in which death was brought into the world, "and all our woe".<sup>12</sup>

He also comments:

It was to substitute human for infernal [Lilith's] pleasures that Eve was taken ultimately from the side of Adam, and from this point of view we discern another sense in which it was "not good that the man should be alone".<sup>13</sup>

Whether or not Williams' use of *Genesis* 2. 18 is a deliberate echo of Waite's is a question that cannot be answered. However, the reference works in different ways in the hands of the two writers. For Waite, the danger of man being alone is that it might result in a spiritual miscegenation, the mixing of different species that should be kept separate. For Williams the danger lies in being alone, in rejecting other people, and the demands that they make, for the security of solitude where you only pay attention to your own wants and needs. In fact, the introduction of the succubus is not presented primarily in terms of sexual attraction, but rather of rejecting the world. Wentworth has felt interested in Adela Hunt, but is unable to cope with his disappointment when it becomes clear that she prefers Hugh Prescott, a young man of her own age. It is because he does not want to face the problems caused by having a relationship (if not the relationship he desired) with two real human beings that he retreats into illusion. Denied what he wants, he cuts himself off from other people, treating

Pauline with scant attention when she comes to talk to him and asks for help tentatively<sup>14</sup>. Obsessed with his own feelings, Wentworth responds warmly to the succubus' claim:

You don't think about yourself enough.<sup>15</sup>

This self absorption is described by the poet Stanhope (another character that can be identified, in part, with Williams<sup>16</sup>) as Gomorrah:

The Lord's glory fell on the cities of the plain, of Sodom and another. We know all about Sodom nowadays, but perhaps we know the other even better. Men can be in love with men, and women with women, and still be in love and make sounds and speeches, but don't you know how quiet the streets of Gomorrah are? haven't you seen the pools that everlastingly reflect the faces of those who walk with their own phantasms, but the phantasms aren't reflected, and can't be. The lovers of Gomorrah are quite contented, Periel; they don't have to put up with our difficulties. . . . There's no distinction between lover and beloved; they beget themselves on their adoration of themselves, and they live and feed and starve on themselves, and by themselves too.<sup>17</sup>

Any relationship, homosexual or heterosexual, involves contact with another person whose needs and desires are different from your own. The awareness of other needs, and the effort involved in trying to meet them, makes up the complex web of commitments that Williams characterized as the City, using this as a symbol for salvation. It is the City that Wentworth has rejected; the cost and the joy of knowing other people. When he brings the succubus to his house, it asks to be carried over the threshold, in a parody of the marriage tradition. Wentworth lifts it, and finds it an easy weight:

The whole air of the Hill said in his ear, with a crisp intelligence: "You fool, that's not Adela; you couldn't carry Adela. What do you think you'll get out of anything that isn't Adela?" He recognized well enough that the real Adela might have given him

considerable trouble to lift, but his whole damnation was that he would not choose the trouble to lift the real Adela.<sup>19</sup>

It is not important that Wentworth is having an affair with a supernatural creature. The origin of the false Adela is only significant insofar as it highlights that he is absorbed in a fantasy; he has chosen to abandon reality for illusion. The evil that he has chosen is an illusion - that is why it is evil<sup>19</sup>. The genuine Adela is a fact - one that Wentworth finds too difficult to deal with, but a fact nonetheless. In rejecting her, he rejects all other people, and all awkward facts as well. The two processes are interlinked.

By profession, Wentworth is a military historian. His business is presented as analysing evidence, weighing interpretations and determining, as best he can, what happened in the past. He has before him the example of Aston Moffat, another historian:

who would have sacrificed reputation, income, and life, if necessary, for the discovery of one fact about the horse-boys of Edward Plantagenet.<sup>20</sup>

However, Wentworth himself:

raged secretly as he wrote his letters and drew up his evidence; he identified scholarship with himself, and asserted himself under the disguise of a defence of scholarship. He refused to admit that the exact detail of Edward's march was not, in fact, worth to him the cost of a single cigar.<sup>20</sup>

The danger here is not only Wentworth's greed for academic recognition, but also the lack of self knowledge, the deliberate blindness ("he refused to admit") as to motivation. In the same way, Damaris Tighe in *The Place of the Lion* thinks she has written an essay on *Platonic Tradition at the Court*

of Charlemagne, whereas its more accurate title would be Damaristic Tradition at the Court of Damaris<sup>21</sup>. Both of these academics have themselves as their specialist interest, yet pretend to be objective researchers. And this blindness lays Wentworth open to a more serious temptation:

He was finding the answer to Aston Moffat's last published letter difficult, yet he was determined that Moffat could not be right. He was beginning to twist the intention of the sentences in his authorities, preferring strange meanings and awkward constructions, adjusting evidence, manipulating words. In defence of his conclusion he was willing to cheat in the evidence - a habit more usual to religious writers than to historical.<sup>22</sup>

Williams was keenly aware of such pressure on writers, due not only to his own writing but also to his work at the Oxford University Press. In consequence, he was warm in his praise of those who resisted it. In the Preface to his *Witchcraft* he acknowledges his debt to two scholars, commenting:

Both Dr. Summers and Dr. Lea express fixed views; those views, it is true, are in absolute opposition. I am not myself convinced either by Dr. Summer's belief or by Dr. Lea's contempt. But they express the views of two sincere and learned men, neither of whom would willingly alter a single fact in order to support their own view.<sup>23</sup>

Once again, Wentworth is rejecting what is in preference for what might be, fact in preference for illusion.

The double rejection, of people and of facts, continues. Wentworth reads in the paper that Moffat has been knighted in the Birthday Honours. He could rejoice at this, or at least accept it stoically, if not for Moffat's sake then because history has been honoured. He has the choice as

to how he will react, he could know this situation either as good or as evil. His reaction is swift, but also deliberate:

He instantaneously preferred anger, and at once it came; he invoked envy, and it obliged him. He crushed the paper in a rage, then he tore it open, and looked again and again - there it still was. He knew that his rival had not only succeeded, but succeeded at his own expense; what chance was there of another historical knighthood for years? Till that moment he had never thought of such a thing. The possibility had been created and withdrawn simultaneously, leaving the present fact to mock him. The other possibility - of joy in that present fact - receded as fast. He had determined, then and for ever, for ever, for ever, that he would hate the fact, and therefore facts.<sup>24</sup>

It is immediately after this, while Wentworth stands "refusing all joy of facts, and having for long refused all unselfish agony of facts"<sup>25</sup> that the succubus first comes to him. Although it can comfort him for a while, in the end it too is rejected, for it symbolizes something outside himself:

She was not less preferable than she had been for long to the real Adela, but she was less preferable to his unimagined dream. He wanted to want her; he did not want her to go; but he could not - not as he had done. Even she was a betrayal, she was a thing outside.<sup>26</sup>

The novel ends with Wentworth no longer aware of anything at all, not even himself, let alone anything external<sup>27</sup>. To misquote *Matthew* 16 vs. 26, he has lost the whole world, and in doing so he has lost own soul as well.

Even as Wentworth descends into damnation and illusion, so his journey is contrasted with an anonymous labourer who moves towards salvation. When the novel opens he is already dead. He had had a miserable life, being laughed at by his workmates and nagged by his wife, so that when he was sacked from a building site, he had had enough. Everyone had rejected him, now he rejected everything. He returned to the house on which he was working (the house which becomes Wentworth's) and hung himself. And yet this has not been the end. He remains on the Hill, in a world of his own,

barely conscious of anyone else, or they of him. Save for the feeling of peace this gives him, his position at this point is remarkably close to that of Wentworth at the close of the book.<sup>28</sup>

However the suicide does not remain in this state. He is given chances that he was denied before through the workings of Justice and through the operation of co-inherence. The formal compact of substitution that Peter Stanhope makes with Pauline Anstruther has already been discussed<sup>29</sup>, and other, less formal, operations are at work throughout the novel. In his other world the suicide sees his wife, himself as he used to be, even his foreman, and he runs in terror from them all. But then he is given a glimpse of Pauline's grandmother, Margaret, and she of him. She gives him strength, but all she says is:

"My dear, how tired you look !"

He tried to answer, to thank her, to tell her more, to learn salvation from her. His life, in and out of the body, had forgotten the time when a woman's voice had last sounded with friendship in his ears.<sup>30</sup>

Margaret gives the labourer strength, and receives it from Pauline. Yet what they do rests upon a far greater work of substitution:

He moaned a little, a moan not quite of pain, but of intention and the first faint wellings of recognized obedience and love. All his past efforts of good temper and kindness were in it; they had seemed to be lost; and they lived.

But that moan was not only his. As if the sound released something greater than itself, another moan answered it. . . . The dead man felt it and was drawn back away from that window into his own world of being, where also something suffered and was free. The groan was at once dereliction of power and creation of power. In it, far off, beyond vision in the depths of all the worlds, a god, unamenable to death, awhile endured and died.<sup>31</sup>

This giving and receiving of help, the "bearing of one another's burdens" to which Stanhope refers<sup>32</sup>, is what draws some of the characters towards salvation. Wentworth, in rejecting this exchange, descends away. To repeat the authorial comment made when he carries the succubus over the threshold:

his whole damnation was that he would not choose the trouble to lift the real Adela<sup>33</sup>

In the final chapter Wentworth goes to London by train. Pauline who meets him at the station is concerned, and offers to travel with him. He rejects the offer in alarm, and hurries off to "a distant compartment"<sup>34</sup>. She is restrained from further action by Stanhope's warning:

You can't do anything unless he chooses<sup>35</sup>

The last time the suicide is seen he is asking Pauline for help - specifically for directions to London:

"Are you sure you won't stay to-night and go in the morning - fare and all ?" So she might have asked any of her friends, whether it had been a fare or or a book or love or something of no more and no less importance.

"Quite, miss," he said, lifting his hand to his cap again in an archangelic salute to the Mother of God. "It doesn't matter perhaps, but I think I ought to get on. They may be waiting for me."

"I see," she said, and added with a conscious laughter, "One never knows, does one ?"

"O I wouldn't say *never*, miss," he answered.<sup>36</sup>

Originally the labourer had been so anxious to avoid London that he committed suicide to avoid returning there<sup>37</sup>. Even more significantly, in Williams' mind London represents the City - the new Jerusalem seen by John, the symbol of corporate salvation<sup>38</sup>. With the help of others, the suicide

has chosen to take his place in the City, to be part of the give and take of relationships. He has received help; it is certain that he will be called upon to give it. What had been evil to him he now knows as good. Wentworth has also made his choice - to reject help that is offered, to refuse to give help when it is needed - and travels to Hell in "a distant compartment". He has chosen to know good as evil.

And so, among the many references to the Eden myth which abound in *Descent into Hell*, we have returned to Williams' understanding of the Fall<sup>29</sup>. Even Pauline, who has spent years being frightened of meeting her doppelgänger, is brought to the point where that meeting is a source of rejoicing for her and for an ancestor of hers four hundred years earlier. What had seemed very evil to her was, in truth, good known as antagonism:

Pauline sighed deeply with her joy. This then, after so long, was their meeting and their reconciliation: their perfect reconciliation, for this other had done what she had desired, and yet not the other, but she, for it was she who had all her life carried a fear which was not her fear but another's, until in the end it had become for her in turn not hers but another's. Her heart was warm, as if the very fire her ancestor had feared was a comfort to her now. The voice behind her sang, repeating the voice in front, "I have seen the salvation of my God."

Salvation has been accomplished through the web of co-inherence and through recognizing the evil of the past as good. They are two sides of the same coin.



Footnotes:

1. Thomas T. Howard *The Novels of Charles Williams* OUP, 1983, pg. 181
2. Glen Cavaliero *Charles Williams: Poet of Theology* Macmillan, 1983, pg. 78
3. Ibid, pg. 90
4. i. e. Cavaliero pg. 90, Howard pg. 200, Gareth Knight *The Magical World of the Inklings* Element Books, 1990, pg. 191
5. See above, all of Chapter 1, but particularly pgs. 5-9
6. A.E. Waite *The Secret Doctrine of Israel* Occult Research Press, 1913, pg. 94
7. *Descent into Hell*, Faber, 1937, reprinted Eerdmans 1977, pg. 60. All references are to the Eerdmans edition.
8. Ibid, pg. 109
9. Howard pg. 199
10. *Descent into Hell* pg. 86
11. Ibid, pg. 89
12. *The Secret Doctrine of Israel*, footnote to pg. 102
13. Ibid, pg. 104
14. *Descent into Hell* pgs. 46-49
15. Ibid, pg. 82
16. A.M. Hadfield *Charles Williams: an exploration of his Life and Work*, OUP, 1983, pg. 142:  
[Williams] used "Peter Stanhope" as a pen-name on the title page of the later *Judgement at Chelmsford* [1939] and sometimes in letters.
17. *Descent into Hell* pg. 174
18. Ibid, pgs. 129-130
19. cf Williams' epigram, "Hell is always inaccurate", *The Image of the City*, OUP, 1958, pg. 30
20. *Descent into Hell* pg. 38
21. *The Place of the Lion*, Gollancz, 1931, pg. 22
22. *Descent into Hell*, pg. 39

23. *Witchcraft*, Faber, 1941, pg. 10
24. *Descent into Hell*, pgs. 80-81
25. *Ibid*, pg. 81
26. *Ibid*, pg. 199
27. *Ibid*, pg. 221:  
He had now no consciousness of himself as such, for the magical mirrors of Gomorrah had been broken, and the city itself had been blasted, and he was out beyond it in the blankness of a living oblivion, tormented by oblivion.
28. *Ibid*, pgs. 26-34
29. *Above*, pg. 31
30. *Descent into Hell*, pg. 121
31. *Ibid*, pg. 124
32. *Galatians* 6 vs. 2. Quoted by Stanhope in *Descent into Hell*, pg. 98
33. *Descent into Hell*, pgs. 129-130
34. *Ibid*, pg. 214
35. *Ibid*, pg. 214. See also *The Descent of the Dove* Longmans, 1939, pg. 40:  
The imaginations of the Alexandrian fathers were courteous; their visions were humane. Origen extended that vision so far as to teach the final restitution of all things, including the devils themselves. It is impossible that some such vision should not linger in any courteous mind, but to teach it as a doctrine almost always ends in the denial of free-will. If God has character, if man has choice, an everlasting rejection of God by man must be admitted as a possibility; that is, hell must remain. The situation of the devils (if any) is not man's business.
36. *Descent into Hell* pg. 166
37. *Ibid*, pg. 27
38. Hadfield pgs. 53-55. See also *Taliessin Through Logres* OUP, 1938, "Bors to Elayne; on the King's Coins", pg. 45 (emphasis Williams'):  
- and what is the City's breath? -  
*dying each other's life, living each other's death.*
39. See above pgs. 38, 76-77
40. *Descent into Hell* pg. 170

### 3.7 All Hallows' Eve

Charles Williams' opinion was that *All Hallows' Eve* was, in some ways, a continuation of *Descent into Hell*, in which the same themes were explored<sup>1</sup>. It would be possible to take the opposite point of view, and see the later novel as a step backwards. As stated earlier<sup>2</sup>, *Descent into Hell* contains few occult details. Critics who choose to see Williams as obsessed with the arcane might wish to interpret this as a hopeful sign that the novelist was abandoning unhealthy preoccupations. And yet, in this his last novel (published in 1945, the year of his death) he describes the operations of a black magician in detail, comparable only to Gregory Persimmons in *War in Heaven*. If nothing else, it shows the abiding imaginative debt Williams owed to A. E. Waite. He had left the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross in 1927 - almost twenty years later he could still use the ritual and apparatus for his own purposes.

Where there is important continuity between the last two novels Williams wrote is in his exploration of the idea of the City, and it is that idea which will be examined in his chapter. In the earlier novel, one minor character, the suicide, having been reconciled begins to make his way to London<sup>3</sup>. The turning from his solitary existence to the life of the community, represented by the city, symbolizes his salvation, his deliberate involvement in the web of co-inherence. In *All Hallows' Eve* no-one has to travel to London, for all the action takes place there, but there is movement between the two levels on which this location exists. One is the physical city, recovering from the damage of the War, filled with many people caught up in their own business. The other is silent, almost

empty. We see two of its inhabitants alone, but that is because we see only the outskirts of this city. This is that part of the heavenly City, the new Jerusalem, which resembles London. Resembles is not strong enough to describe the relationship between these two. They share the same landmarks, they are the same place, and yet they are not. They co-inhere.<sup>4</sup>

Because of the similarity between the two Londons, it is not always obvious where the action is taking place. This is used effectively from the very beginning of the novel, where there is a description of Lester Furnival standing on Westminster Bridge. She has been waiting for her husband, Richard, but when he appears they only exchange a few words before he fades away. She is overcome with grief at this separation, believing him to be dead. It is only slowly that the realization dawns on her that it is she who has died:

"Dead," she thought, "dead." He could not otherwise have gone; never in all their quarrels had he gone or she; that certainly had allowed them a license they dared not otherwise have risked. . . . Dead, and she had done it once too often. Dead, and this had been their parting. Dead; her misery swamped her penance. They had told each other it made no difference and now it had made this. They had reassured each other in their reconciliations, for though they had been fools and quick-tempered, high egoists and bitter of tongue, they had been much in love and they had been fighting their way. But she felt her own inner mind had always foreboded this. Dead; separate; forever separate. It did not, in that separation, much matter who was dead. If it had been she -

She. On the instant she knew it.<sup>5</sup>

Although it is unusual for a novel to have a dead person as a central character, her death is not the most important thing about Lester. In a manner similar to C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce* (1946), *All Hallows' Eve* makes points about this life, rather than offering a blueprint for the next.<sup>6</sup> The main theme of the novel is illustrated in Lester's train of thought quoted above. Reconciliation - the work of forgiving and being

forgiven - is to be practised or rejected by all the main characters. Those who practise it will be drawn in to the life of the City, while those who reject will exclude themselves.

The theme of forgiveness has been present in the other novels, in the relationship between Anthony and Damaris in *The Place of the Lion* or Nancy and Henry in *The Greater Trumps*, but it is here that Williams illustrates it in most detail. In 1942 he had written a short book of popular theology, *The Forgiveness of Sins*. The introduction stated:

Yet if there is one thing which is obviously either a part of the universe or not - and on knowing whether it is or not our life depends - it is the forgiveness of sins. Our lives depend on it in every sense. If there is God, if there is sin, if there is forgiveness, we must know it in order to live to him. If there are men, and if forgiveness is part of the interchanged life of men, then we must know it in order to live to and among them. Forgiveness, if it is at all a principle of that interchanged life, is certainly the deepest of all; if it is not, then the whole principle of interchange is false.<sup>7</sup>

*All Hallows' Eve* could have been written to demonstrate that final sentence: "Forgiveness, if it is at all a principle of that interchanged life, is certainly the deepest of all".

Lester's death left many relationships unresolved, but she is given the chance to put these right. One of the most important of these turns out to be with an old school-friend, Betty Wallingford. Or to describe the relationship more accurately:

[Betty] would have liked to be friends with Lester Grantham, who was now Lester Furnival, but it had never come about. At school Lester had never wanted to be bothered with her, though she [Lester] had been in a vague way half-scornfully kind.<sup>8</sup>

Betty is being used by the black magician, Simon Leclerc, who is sending her spirit into the City, where, no longer bound by temporal constraints,

she can discover the future and report it back to him. His aim is to break the link between her body and spirit (that is, murder her by means of his magic) so that she might be a permanent instrument for him to use. Despite being dead, she would remain his slave, doing his will. Lester is to be instrumental in freeing Betty from this domination, but there are more important matters to be dealt with first. First Lester is made aware of all the times she had slighted her would-be friend, and then she has to remind Betty of them also:

Lester said, rather helplessly, "It's all those times . . . those times at school and afterwards. I can't manage them without you."

Betty wrinkled her forehead. She said in some surprise, "Those times at school? But, Lester, I always liked you at school."

"Perhaps you did," said Lester. "But you may remember that I didn't behave as if I particularly liked you."

"Oh, didn't you?" Betty answered. "I know you didn't particularly want me, but why should you? I was much younger than you and I expect I was something of a nuisance. As far as I can remember, you put up with me nobly. But I don't remember much about it. Need we? It's so lovely of you to come and see me now."

Lester realized that this was going to be worse than she had supposed. She had prepared herself to ask for forgiveness, but that, it seemed, was not enough. She must herself bring the truth to Betty's reluctant mind; nothing else than the truth would be any good. . . . She said - it was the most bitter thing she had ever done; she seemed to taste on her tongue the hard and bitter substance of that moment - she said, "Try and remember."<sup>9</sup>

Lester exclaimed, "You've remembered?" and Betty, now actually breaking into a gay laugh, answered, "Darling, how serious you are! Yes, I've remembered."

"Everything?" Lester persisted; and Betty, looking her full in the eyes, so that suddenly Lester dropped her own, answered, "Everything". She added, "It was lovely of you to ask me. I think perhaps I never quite wanted to remember - Oh all sorts of things - until you asked me, and then I just did, and now I shan't mind whatever else there is. Oh Lester, how good you are to me!"<sup>10</sup>

Before the objection is raised that this is not natural behaviour from a woman who has just remembered various childhood slights, it must be said

that Betty, having just returned from one of her visits to the City, is behaving as a citizen of that place. But Williams is concerned to emphasize that nothing can be forgotten or ignored - facts must be recognized if facts are to be forgiven. An epigram which typifies Williams is "Hell is always inaccurate"<sup>11</sup>, in which case the business of Heaven is to be accurate: "nothing else than the truth would do"<sup>12</sup>.

Truth having been established, forgiveness having taken place, Lester can now stand in Betty's place, and bear her burdens for her<sup>12</sup>. When Simon attempts his greatest magic, to send Betty's spirit into the City permanently to do his bidding, Lester makes herself the target for his spell. This would be more than she can bear, except that she is given strength by another act of substitution:

Lester felt the strange intoning call not to Betty but to her; it was to her that it was meant. Just as she realized it, she lost it. Her heart was so suddenly and violently racked that she thought she cried out. . . . She fought against dissolution. . . .

Of one other thing she was conscious. She had been standing and now she was no longer standing. She was leaning back on something, some frame which from her buttocks to her head supported her; indeed she could have believed, but she was not sure, that her arms, flung out on each side held on to a part of the frame, as along a beam of wood. In her fighting and sinking consciousness, she seemed to be almost lying along it, as she might on a bed, only it was slanting. Between standing and lying, she held and was held. If it gave, as at any moment it might give, she would fall into the small steady chant which, heard in her ears and seen along her thighs, was undoing her. Then she would be undone. She pressed herself against that sole support.<sup>13</sup>

It is typical of Williams that, in his fiction, he talks rarely of Christ or the Cross, even as he avoids the terms God or Heaven. He prefers not to use words that carry so many associations<sup>14</sup>. However, it is clear that the Cross is being referred to here - the greatest substitution was the Atonement, from which all other substitutions derive<sup>15</sup>. Lester can feel the

Cross bearing her up, because she has already been doing the work of Christ. She could not have asked Betty for forgiveness, or made her friend remember past hurts so that they became opportunities for joy, without the work of the Atonement, as Williams understood it.

In *He Came Down From Heaven*, Williams devotes a chapter to an interpretation of Mark's Gospel: "The Precursor and the Incarnation of the Kingdom". When he reaches the final events of that Gospel he comments:

The Passion and the Resurrection have been necessarily divided in ritual and we think of them as separate events. So certainly they were, and yet not as separate as that. They are two operations in one; they are the hour of the coming of the Kingdom. A new knowledge arises. Men had determined to know good as evil; there could be but one perfect remedy for that - to know the evil of the past itself as good, and to be free from the necessity of the knowledge of evil in the future; to find right knowledge and perfect freedom together; to know all things as occasions of love.<sup>16</sup>

The sin of the Adam had been to know "good as antagonism"<sup>17</sup>. The Cross could easily be taken as a symbol of that antagonism, but St. Paul describes it as an instrument of reconciliation:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.<sup>18</sup>

Williams' understanding of this reconciliation is that, through the Crucifixion and Resurrection, the good that had been known as evil could now known as good once more. From this restored perspective it is possible "to know all things as an occasion of love", as Betty and Lester discover when Betty remembers the past<sup>19</sup>.



The same knowledge is shared between Lester and her husband, Richard. This is even more important than the exchange between the two women, because it is not clear that Lester had to forgive Betty of anything. With the married couple there has to be forgiveness on both sides:

Lester's voice went on. "But I've been tiresome so often, darling. I've been beastly to you. I -"

He said, "You've never been tiresome," and she, "No; speak truth now, my own. I -"

He said, "Very well then; you have. And what in all the heavens and hells, and here too, does it matter? Do we keep accounts about each other? If it's the last word I speak I shall still say you were too good for me."

"And -?" she said, and her laughter was more than laughter; it was a speech of pure joy. "Go on, blessing - if it's our last word."

"And I'm too good for you," Richard said.<sup>20</sup>

Williams had already spoken of the need for forgiveness to be both given and received:

The condition of forgiving then is to be forgiven; the condition of being forgiven is to forgive. The two conditions are co-existent; they are indeed the very point of co-existence, the root of the new union, the beginning of the recovery of the co-inherence in which all creation had begun. Out of that point of double submission the City of God was to rise.<sup>21</sup>

Against the deepening patterns of forgiveness and co-inherence that emerge throughout the novel, the black magic of Simon Leclerc proves increasingly futile and ultimately self-destructive. All things can be known as occasions for love, however trivial or negative they may seem:

The Thames was dirty and messy. Twigs, bits of paper and wood, cords, old boxes drifted on it. Yet to the new-eyed Lester it was not a depressing sight. The dirtiness of the water was, at that particular point, what it should be and therefore pleasant enough. The evacuations of the City had their place in the City; how else could the City be the City? Corruption (so to call it) was tolerable, even adequate and proper, even glorious. These things were also facts. They could not be forgotten or lost in fantasy; all that had been, was; all that was, was. A sodden mass of cardboard and paper drifted by, but the soddenness was itself a joy, and all that happened, in

this great material world, was good. The very heaviness of the heavy sky was a wonder, and the unutilitarian expectation of rain a delight.<sup>22</sup>

It is appropriate that it is the Thames that becomes a symbol of the redemption of all things, for Williams uses water imagery throughout *All Hallows' Eve*. In the final chapter Simon's magical artefacts are dissolved by rain that does not break down the roof, but comes through it<sup>23</sup>. This rain is linked with a mysterious lake, to which Betty often refers. The memory of this lake has given her strength to endure all the magical experimentation to which she has been subjected:

. . . . at least, I suppose it was a lake. If it was a river, it was very broad. I must have been very small indeed, because, you know, it always seems as if I'd only just floated up through the lake, which is nonsense. But sometimes I almost think I did, because deep down I can remember the fishes, though not so as to describe them, and none of them took any notice of me, except one with a kind of great horned head which was swimming round me and diving under me. It was quite clear there under the water and I didn't even know I was there. I mean I wasn't thinking of myself. And then the fish dived again and went below me, and I felt him lifting me up with his back, and then the water plunged under me and lifted me, and I came out on the surface. And there I lay; it was sunny and bright, and I drifted in the sun - it was almost as if I was lying on the sunlight itself - and presently I saw the shore - a few steps in a low cliff, and a woman standing there. I didn't know who she was, but I know now, since you made me remember - Lester, I do owe you such a lot - it was a nurse I once had, but not for very long. She bent down and lifted me out of the water.<sup>24</sup>

Such a description draws on many sources, both mythically - with the sense of the waters of creation - and psychologically - the waters of birth inside the womb. Williams chooses to make an explicitly Christian connection, when he reveals that the nurse had baptized Betty, against the wishes of her mother, herself a devotee of Simon<sup>25</sup>. Baptism is appropriate to this novel for the earliest references link it not only with birth and new beginnings, but also with forgiveness.<sup>26</sup>

*All Hallows' Eve*

Earlier it was observed that, in *War in Heaven*, the eucharistic imagery had greater force than the occult<sup>27</sup>. In *All Hallows' Eve* the baptismal, imaginatively reinterpreted by Williams, has the same effect. In the novels where he is most explicitly occult he is also most sacramental. Not only in the beliefs, but in the rites of the Church, could he find inspiration both theologically and imaginatively. In his final novel, more than any of the other six, Williams combined his theology and his imagination.

Footnotes:

1. A. M. Hadfield, *Charles Williams: an exploration of his life and work*, OUP, 1983, pg. 228: "Charles [Williams] assured [T. S.] Eliot that it [*All Hallows' Eve*] went on from the point at which *Descent into Hell* left off."

2. See above, pg. 114

3. *Descent into Hell*, pg. 165

4. C. S. Lewis may have been influenced by this idea when he describes Aslan's Country in *The Last Battle*, The Bodley Head, 1956, reprinted Puffin, 1964, pgs. 164-5. After Narnia has been destroyed, the true Narnia is discovered and:

"Why !" exclaimed Peter. "It's England. And that's the house itself - Professor Kirk's old home in the country where all our adventures began !"

"I thought that house had been destroyed," said Edmund.

"So it was," said the Faun. "But you are now looking at the England within England, the real England just as this is the real Narnia. And in that inner England no good thing is destroyed."

5. *All Hallows' Eve*, Faber & Faber, 1945, reprinted by Eerdmans 1982, pg. 6. All references are to the Eerdmans edition.

6. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, Geoffrey Bles, 1946. At pages 116-7 the author has a conversation with the heavenly figure who has been his guide:

"These conversations between the Spirits and the Ghosts - were they only the mimicry of choices made long ago ?"

"Or might ye not as well say, anticipations of a choice to be made at the end of all things ? But ye'd do better to say neither. Ye saw the choices a bit more clearly than ye could see them on earth: the lens was clearer. But it was still seen through a lens. Do not ask of a vision in a dream more than a vision in a dream can give. . . . Ye are only dreaming. And if ye come to tell of what ye have seen, make it plain that it was but a dream. See ye make it very plain. Give no poor fool the pretext to think ye are claiming knowledge of what no mortal knows."

It is interesting that both *The Great Divorce* and *All Hallows' Eve* describe an after-life that has affinities with the Roman Catholic concept of Purgatory, in that the dead are able to improve morally. Unlike Lewis, Williams never explicitly declared a belief in Purgatory.

7. *The Forgiveness of Sins*, Geoffrey Bles, 1942, pg. 2. This work was dedicated "To The Inklings", and was part of "The Christian Challenge Series", as was C. S. Lewis' *The Problem of Pain* (1940).

8. *All Hallows' Eve*, pg. 68

9. Ibid, pgs. 129-130
10. Ibid, pg. 132
11. From the introduction to the World's Classics *The English Poems of John Milton*, 1940, reprinted in *The Image of the City*, OUP, 1958, pg. 30
12. A reference to the imagery of *Galatians* 6. 2. See above, pgs. 30-31
13. *All Hallows' Eve*, pg. 159. See above, pg. 122, where Margaret, bearing the suicide's burdens, is linked to the Cross.
14. This is a trait that can backfire. In *All Hallows' Eve* pg. 133, "the City's own Lord Mayor" is an arch circumlocution for Christ.
15. See above, all of Chapter 2, but particularly pg. 30
16. *He Came Down From Heaven*, Heinemann, 1938, pg. 77
17. Ibid, pg. 19
18. *Ephesians* 2. 13-16. See also *Colossians* 1. 20, *1 Corinthians* 1. 22-24
19. *All Hallows' Eve*, pg. 132, quoted above pg. 130
20. Ibid, pg. 233. See also Anthony's final perception of the relationship between himself and Quentin - *The Place of the Lion* pg. 189, quoted above pgs. 94, 95
21. *The Forgiveness of Sins*, pg. 66
22. *All Hallows' Eve*, pg. 222
23. Ibid, pgs. 261-266
24. Ibid, pgs. 134-135
25. Ibid, pg. 205
26. Among them *Romans* 6. 4, *Colossians* 2. 12, *Mark* 1. 4
27. See above, pgs. 67-69

#### 4: Conclusion

The stories of Charles Williams, then, are not like those of Edgar Allan 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 an 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 this experience that he has had. When I say we are persuaded to believe in the supernatural world of Charles Williams, I do not mean that we necessarily give complete credence to all the apparatus of magic, white or black, that he employs. There is much that he has invented, or borrowed from the literature of the occult, merely for the sake of telling a good story. In reading *All Hallows' Eve*, we can, if we like, believe that the methods of the magician Simon for controlling mysterious forces could all be used with success by anyone with suitable natural gifts and special training. We can, on the other hand, find the machinery of the story no more credible than that of any popular tale of vampires, werewolves, or demonic possession. But whether credulous or incredulous about the actual kinds of event in the story, we come to perceive that they are a vehicle 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.<sup>1</sup>

This is T. S. Eliot's verdict on the novels of Charles Williams. Far from seeing them as evidence that Williams was arrested "at the schoolboy (and -girl) stage"<sup>2</sup>, as Leavis had done, Eliot denies any suggestion that they were written for spiritual titillation. Rather, they are vehicles through which the author can share with his readers a legitimate perception of the world.

Central to that perception is a belief in the omnipotence and benevolence of God. It is this belief that allows him to make the claim: "there was not . . . there never has been and never will be - anything else than the good to know"<sup>3</sup>. Yet this is not a glib assurance arising from ignorance of contemporary evil and suffering - the final chapter of *The Forgiveness of Sins* (1942) is a discussion of the difficulty and the

## Conclusion

necessity of mutual forgiveness between the Allies and the Nazis once the War was over. Williams was deeply aware of the existence of evil, yet he understood it to be "good known as antagonism"<sup>3</sup>. Throughout the novels this understanding is conveyed: through Rosamund in *Shadows of Ecstasy*, the Archdeacon in *War in Heaven*, Durrant in *The Place of the Lion*, and Nancy in *The Greater Trumps*. However, it has to be admitted that "good as antagonism" is a minor theme in *Shadows of Ecstasy*, and hard to perceive at all in *Many Dimensions*. Only in the last two novels, *Descent into Hell* and *All Hallows' Eve*, are the two sides of this understanding displayed fully. Wentworth's rejection of fact and escape into illusion, in *Descent into Hell*, shows good being perceived as evil, while Lester's repentance, in *All Hallows' Eve*, shows that whatever is evil can be reclaimed, and known as an "occasion of love"<sup>4</sup>.

Despite the wealth of esoteric lore that Williams has chosen to include, some of his most vivid images are sacramental: the Communion in *War in Heaven* which completes the novel, or in *The Greater Trumps* on which the plot turns. Finally there are the many references to Baptismal waters running through *All Hallows' Eve*<sup>5</sup>. Throughout all the novels there are echoes of, and direct quotations from, the Bible, as well as occasional allusions to *The Book of Common Prayer*<sup>6</sup>. His respect for the Roman Catholic Church is clear in *War in Heaven*, and for the Nonconformist in *The Place of the Lion*; equally clear however, is that Williams himself was most comfortable within the Church of England.

What is to be made, then, of his use of the occult? Is it the greatest of his lapses of taste, and would the novels have been better without it?

## Conclusion

Possibly they would have been more accessible, but the esoteric provided Williams with symbols congenial to his imagination. Cavaliero concludes:

while the occult is one way of demonstrating hidden connections and the resolution of dualities within the co-inherence, it also, in its pretensions and yet obvious artificiality, suggests an absolute relativity. There is no confusing the imagery with what it signifies, which remains by definition hidden. The intellectual possibilities of the myths and symbols Williams employs afford his powers of analysis full scope.<sup>7</sup>

The novelist employs these myths and symbols as a way of exploring various aspects of the human condition, such as greed, dishonesty, love, repentance and forgiveness. By making these forces to some extent external Williams is able to analyse them, and suggest connections between them, even though characterization can suffer as a result.

Through the many myths on which Williams draws, the biblical and the occult, he sets out his vision of redemption. Because of the Atonement, what had been known as evil can now be known as good, there is nothing that cannot be known as an occasion for love. It is a vision which informs all of his works and, in closing, it is worth quoting from the final poem in the sequence *The Region of the Summer Stars*:

The Pope prayed: ". . . .  
That Thou canst be, Thou only  
everywhere art; let hell also confess thee,  
bless thee, praise thee, and magnify thee for ever."

The Pope passed to sing the Christmas Eucharist.  
He invoked peace on the bodies and souls of the dead,  
yoked fast to him and he to them,  
co-inherent all in Adam and all in Christ.<sup>8</sup>

It is because all are co-inherent in Christ, as well as in Adam, that even Hell can "confess thee, bless thee, praise thee, and magnify thee for ever"<sup>9</sup>; all things can be redeemed.



Footnotes:

1. T. S. Eliot in his Introduction to *All Hallows' Eve* (dated August 14 1948), *All Hallows' Eve*, Eerdmans Edition 1981, pg. xv
2. F. R. Leavis *The Common Pursuit*, Pelican Books, 1978, pg. 252, reprinted from *Scrutiny*, vol. 16, no. 4, (Winter 1949), pgs. 339-44. "The Logic of Christian Discrimination".
3. *He Came Down From Heaven*, Heinemann, 1938, pg. 19
4. *Ibid*, pg. 77
5. Among the many references to baptismal waters in *All Hallows' Eve* are pgs. 134, 182, 207-8, 256-267
6. *The Greater Trumps*, pg. 109, quotes from the Athanasian Creed, and *War in Heaven*, pg. 254, from "The Order of the Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion" - both from the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* (1662)
7. Glen Cavaliero, *Charles Williams: Poet of Theology*, Macmillan, 1983, pg. 161
8. "The Prayers of the Pope", from *The Region of the Summer Stars*, Poetry (London) Editions, 1944, pg. 60
9. A deliberate echo of the words of the Gloria, which comes at the end of the *Book of Common Prayer* Communion Service.

### Appendix A

#### Charles Walter Stansby Williams - principal events in his life

Charles Williams referred to many of his friends by nicknames. These are indicated by quotation marks.

- 1886 Sept 20 born, 3 Spencer Road (now Caedmon), Holloway, North London  
Nov 7 baptised at St. Anne's, Finsbury Park
- 1889 sister, Edith, born
- 1894 March family move to 15 (now 36) Victoria Street, St. Albans  
CW goes to Abbey School
- 1898 CW wins County Council scholarship to St. Albans Grammar School
- 1901 Autumn enrolls at University College London.
- 1903 Jan matriculates, enters on Arts Course. Has to leave before the end of the session for financial reasons, without taking a degree.  
Oct takes Civil Service examination for a Second Division Clerkship - unsuccessful
- 1904 begins work as a clerk at Methodist Bookroom in Holborn
- 1908 June 9 joins staff of OUP, as a proof reader  
Dec meets Florence Conway (future wife)
- 1910 corrects proofs for Cary's translation of *The Divine Comedy*
- 1912 Nov first book published - *The Silver Stair* - paid for by Alice and Wilfred Meynell
- 1914 August outbreak of war. CW declared unfit for active service because of eyesight. (Two of his closest friends were to be killed in France: Harold Eyers, May 1915, Ernest Nottingham, June 1917)
- 1915 Summer CW sends A. E. Waite a copy of *The Silver Stair* after reading *The Hidden Church of the Holy Graal*
- 1917 April 12 marries Florence Conway ("Michal") at St. Albans Abbey  
Sept 21 received into Waite's Fellowship of the Rosy Cross as Frater Qui Sinit Veniat  
*Poems of Conformity* published
- 1919 "Michal" has book published, *Christian Symbolism*, includes passages by CW.

Appendix A

- 1920            *Divorce* published
- 1922 July 6?    only child, Michael Stansby Williams, born  
 Autumn        begins giving evening lectures for the London County Council
- 1923-24        writes *Outlines of Romantic Love*; rejected by OUP, Nonesuch, and Faber. Not published until 1990
- 1924 March     OUP moves to Amen House, Warwick Square  
                  Phyllis Jones ("Phyllida"/"Celia") joins OUP, in charge of library at Amen House. CW falls in love with her  
                  *Windows of the Night* published
- 1925            writes first novel *The Black Bastard*; rejected by Faber (finally published as *Shadows of Ecstasy*, 1933)
- 1926            writes *The Corpse*; rejected by Faber (finally published as *War in Heaven*, 1930)
- 1927 April 28   *The Masque of the Manuscript* performed in the Library for Humphrey Milford's birthday ("Caesar", Publisher of OUP)  
                  June 29    Third Spokesman in "The Ceremony of Consecration on the Threshold of Sacred Mystery" - the last time CW attended any of the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross' ceremonies
- 1929 Jan        CW's father, Walter, dies
- 1930 August    CW discovers that "Celia" and Gerry Hopkins love each other  
 ?   ?   ?    "Michal" discovers CW's love for "Celia" (dating conjecture by Hadfield p. 87)  
                  *War in Heaven* published, by Victor Gollancz; also *Poetry at Present*, and *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (2nd edition), edited and with a critical introduction by CW, published
- 1931            *Many Dimensions* and *The Place of the Lion* published
- 1932            *The Greater Trumps* and *The English Poetic Mind* published
- 1933            *Shadows of Ecstasy*, *Bacon*, and *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind* published
- 1934 Sept      "Celia" leaves Amen House, marries Billie Somervaille, and moves to Java  
                  *James I* published
- 1935            *Rochester* published

Appendix A

- 1936 Feb C. S. Lewis reads *The Place of the Lion*, CW proofreads *The Allegory of Love*. Their friendship begins through exchanging letters.  
*Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury* and *Queen Elizabeth* published
- 1937 *Descent Into Hell* and *Henry VII* published
- 1938 Jan lectures at the Sorbonne "On Byron and Byronism"  
early "Celia" returns to London, her marriage having broken down. "She and Charles resumed very intermittent relations. He did not look for any renewal of the vision nor did he deny the past", Hadfield p. 164  
*Taliessin Through Logres* and *He Came Down From Heaven* published
- 1939 Sept 3 war declared; staff of Amen House move to Oxford. Michal dislikes Oxford, and decides to stay in London.  
Sept "The Companions of the Co-inherence" are established  
*Judgement at Chelmsford* and *The Descent of the Dove* published
- 1940 Jan 29 CW begins his series of lectures on Milton  
Feb 5 lectures on *Comus*  
*The English Poems of John Milton*, edited and with an introduction by CW, published
- 1941 *Witchcraft* published
- 1942 *The Forgiveness of Sins* published  
C. S. Lewis' *A Preface to Paradise Lost* published; dedicated to CW. "After Blake, Milton criticism is lost in misunderstanding, and the true line is hardly found again until Mr. Charles Williams' preface [to *The English Poems of John Milton*]." p. 133.
- 1943 Feb 18 awarded an honorary degree of Master of Arts by Oxford  
*The Figure of Beatrice* published
- 1945 May 9 end of war  
11 CW taken into Radcliffe Hospital  
14 CW operated on  
15 CW dies without regaining consciousness  
Buried at St. Cross, Holywell, Oxford  
*All Hallow's Eve* and *The House of the Octopus* published

### Appendix B

#### The Constitution and Laws of the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross (1915)

- 1) The Fellowship of the Rosy Cross is the guardian of a path of symbolism communicated in Ritual after the manner of the chief Instituted Mysteries, past and present.
- 2) The symbolism is concerned only with the quest and attainment of the human soul on its return to the Divine Centre: it is sought thereby to recall its members to the true object of research and the living method of its attainment.
- 3) The Fellowship does not profess to communicate knowledge of the soul and experience in the path of return otherwise than by the mode of symbolism; but this way is sacramental and those who can receive into their hearts the life and grace of the symbolism may attain both knowledge and experience thereby and therein.
- 4) The symbolism of the Fellowship implies a Doctrine and Practice of Mystical Religion, understood in its universal sense.
- 5) It has a message to those who are prepared in Christendom, though the lower Grades are not explicitly Christian Grades.
- 6) The tradition and symbolism of the Fellowship are a derivation from the Secret Doctrine of Israel, known as Kabbalah and embodied in the SEPHER HA ZOHAR.
- 7) The mode of interpretation in respect of Kabbalistic Tradition is a Christian Mode.
- 8) It is to be understood that the Fellowship is similar to other Instituted Mysteries working under particular veils, the Masonic Brotherhood, for example, which uses building symbolism to produce upright and honourable members of the Speculative Art, while the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross uses theosophical symbolism of Israel and seeks to lead thereby into a deeper knowledge of the soul and its relation to GOD.
- 9) The Fellowship is open to all who desire the knowledge of Divine Things and union with GOD in Christ, and its path of symbolism is a true light of understanding on the Path of Union.
- 10) The common aspiration of its members is a living bond between them, the Fellowship is a living body, and to those who are properly prepared it should be a source of spiritual life.
- 11) Initiation and advancement in the Fellowship take place under pledges of secrecy, being (a) the condition imposed inwardly by all Instituted Mysteries; (b) the outward indication of the inward way of the spirit, which is secret and apart from the world; (c) a sacrament of the analogy between birth into physical life and the new birth or regeneration of mystical life, which are both secret processes, as are also those of physical and spiritual growth; (d) the proper method by

which things appertaining to the Sanctuary are reserved to the Sanctuary alone.

- 12) The Brethren of all Grades are covenanted (a) to remember that if they seek first the Kingdom of GOD and His Justice, all other things shall be added unto them which are needful for the soul's progress and its attainment of the Divine Term; (b) to seek the knowledge of Divine Things and conscious union with GOD, so far as it may be possible in that sphere of life in which it has pleased GOD to call them; (c) to maintain the veil of secrecy; (d) to live in peace with one another; (e) to help each other in spiritual things, as they would wish to be helped themselves; (f) to avoid all interference with the Official Religion professed by their co-heirs in the Fellowship and to discourage it when attempted in their own case; (g) to endeavour before all things to realize in their own hearts those high intimations which are contained in the symbolism of the Grades.
- 13) The Constitution of the Fellowship is hierarchic and not elective, its government being vested in the Emperor of the Rite, who has power to appoint his successor, subject to confirmation by the body general of Adepti Exempti, and also to appoint substitutes for the government of the Temple.
- 14) The conditions on which persons are received into the Fellowship are embodied in the Form of Profession supplied through their Sponsors to Postulants and such persons may be of either sex. The decision as to reception rest solely with the Emperor.
- 15) This general principle being recognized as ir repealable, it shall be lawful to establish Temples consisting of men or women only, under proper warrant from the Emperor, should a sufficient reason be forthcoming.
- 16) The conditions of advancement from Grade to Grade in the Fellowship are: (a) the Warrant of the Emperor or his substitute; (b) the desire of the Postulant on his own part; (c) sufficient evidence that he or she has fulfilled the duties of the Grade to which he belongs.
- 17) No transcription of manuscripts is permitted without authority, which must be applied for and obtained in writing.
- 18) All copies of Rituals and other papers in the possession of members shall be kept in a locked case or box, bearing the label issued by the Fellowship and certifying that the package must be returned unopened to the address given thereon at the death of the member.
- 19) Members are covenanted to return all Rituals and papers in the case of their resignation or dismissal.
- 20) The Obligatory Meetings of the Fellowship are the Festivals for the celebration of the Vernal and Autumnal Equinox, under reasonable reserves in respect of sickness, prohibitive distance and real inability of other kinds. Attendance is a matter of duty when there is no absolute hindrance.

*Appendix B*

- 21) The history of the Fellowship is communicated in The Third Order only but in one of its forms it is referable to the third quarter of the 18th century, without such antiquity being regarded as *per se* a test of value.
- 22) The construction of the Constitution and of these laws rests in the authority of the Emperor, it being laid down that alterations herein or additions hereto shall be made only with the concurrence of the body general of Adepti belonging to the Third Order.

Source:

*A. E. Waite: Magician of Many Parts* R. A. Gilbert, Crucible 1987, pgs. 183-5

### Appendix C

#### The Company of the Co-Inherence (1939)

- 1) The company has no constitution except in its members. As it was said: *Others he saved, himself he cannot save.*
- 2) It proposes to those members a recognition of their proper natures, a private act of union with the other Companions and with all men, and an activity consistent. It puts itself entirely at the disposal of Almighty God, and it leaves to Holy Luck communication between its members and any enlargement of the Companionship. [It recommends nevertheless that its members shall make a formal act of union with it and of recognition of their own nature.] As it was said: *Am I my brother's keeper ?* and again: *Others have laboured and ye have entered into their labours.*
- 3) Its concern is with the practice of the Co-inherence both as a natural and a supernatural principle. As it was said: *Let Us make man in Our image;* and again: *That they may be one even as we are one.*
- 4) It is therefore, by necessity, Christian. As it was said: *And whoever says there was when this was not, let him be anathema.*
- 5) It intends the study on the contemplative side, of the Co-inherence of the Holy and Blessed Trinity, of the Union of the Two Natures in One Person, of the relation of the God-bearer and the Flesh-taker, of the exchange of the offerings in the Eucharist, and of the whole Catholic Church; on the intellectual, of the Co-inherence of opposite ideals in each other; on the active, of methods of exchange and substitution in all the many forms of love and in all operations of the State [and in all natural things, such as childbirth]. As it was said: *Figlia del tuo figlio;* and again: *Bear ye one another's burdens.*
- 6) It concludes all forms of exchange and substitution in the divine substitution of our Lord in his Passion, and it invokes this Act as the root of all. As it was said: *He demands that we lay down our lives for the brethren;* and again: *we must become, as it were, a double man.*
- 7) The Company will associate itself primarily with four feasts: The Feast of the Annunciation, the Feast of the Blessed Trinity, the Feast of the Transfiguration, and the Commemoration of All Souls. As it was said: *Another will be in me and I in him.*

Taken from the version of the sentences recorded by E. Browett and given to T. H. Mordecai. A slightly different form is recorded by A. M. Hadfield; and significant variations are indicated by square brackets. (Hadfield, *Charles Williams: an Exploration of his Life and Works*, OUP, 1983, pg. 174)



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